



SIXTH OPINION ON CYPRUS

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE FRAMEWORK CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES

Adopted on 1 July 2025

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SUMMARY

1. Cyprus continues to provide strong protection of minority rights for persons belonging to the Armenian, Latin and Maronite religious groups, and applies the Framework Convention on an Article-by-Article basis to persons belonging to the Cyprus Roma. The situation regarding the territorial scope of application of the Framework Convention remains unchanged. Discussions continue on steps to facilitate movement between the government-controlled area and the territory not under its effective control.

2. Cyprus is an ever more diverse society, with 20% of the total population being citizens of other states. The right to free self-identification remains limited, and as a result, only the three "religious groups" are officially recognised. Whereas these three religious groups are accepted as an integral and valued part of the Cypriot society, access to minority rights of Cyprus Roma continues to be very limited. In addition, Cyprus faces new challenges, such as the increase of negative attitudes and xenophobic acts.

Scope of application and right to self-identification (Article 3)

3. The Cypriot authorities have maintained their approach regarding the personal scope of application of the Framework Convention. The Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus, based on a bi-communal system, implies that all citizens of Cyprus must belong either to the Greek Cypriot community or to the Turkish Cypriot community to exercise their civic duties and enjoy their political rights. This constitutional arrangement does not take sufficient account of the diversity of Cypriot society and continues to interfere with the rights of individuals, in particular women and children, whose right to free self-identification is constitutionally even more limited. Armenians and Maronites continue to be referred to as 'religious groups', which is too restrictive considering that their distinctive identities extend beyond their religious affiliations, and encompass linguistic, cultural and historical aspects. Gurbeti Roma continue to be exclusively attached to the Turkish Cypriot community and their distinctive identity is not legally recognised. Turkish-speakers and persons affiliating with the "Turkish Cypriot community" find it difficult to use their first language although it is one of the two official languages in the Republic of Cyprus.

Legal and institutional frameworks on national minorities and for combating discrimination (Article 4)

4. The appointment in October 2024 of a Co-ordinator of Religious Groups within the Presidential Commissioner Office is a step that has been welcomed by the three constitutionally recognised religious groups. However, at present, the Co-ordinator of Religious Groups, neither has a mandate, outlining their responsibilities, nor has adequate financial resources at their disposal. In addition, it does not seem likely that their competencies will be extended to persons belonging to the Cyprus Roma.

5. The ombudsperson, which has multiple competences, also acts as an equality body. The number of complaints lodged with the ombudsperson as an equality body is relatively low and may not correspond to the actual number of alleged discriminatory acts. There seem to be long delays in examining complaints, which may leave victims without a timely redress. As an equality body, there is a need to provide the ombudsperson with the mandate to initiate and participate in court proceedings, as well as to make fuller and more systematic use of the possibilities offered under their mandate, to collect disaggregated equality data, including on compliance with their decisions and to reinforce awareness-raising campaigns.

Support for the preservation and development of minority identities, languages and cultures (Article 5)

6. Cyprus continues to support various cultural projects of the three recognised religious groups to promote their respective culture and traditions. In accordance with its *National Roma Strategic Framework 2021-2030*, some activities are also organised to celebrate the Gurbeti Roma. However, the existing scheme to support cultural activities is only available to the three recognised religious groups.

Combating hate crime and hate speech (Article 6)

7. There is a comprehensive legal framework on hate crime and hate speech. Additionally, various training programmes and projects are organised by the authorities for law enforcement officers. A comprehensive system of data collection on discrimination in the justice system would ensure a more effective implementation of the legislation. Although hate crime and hate speech remain relatively rare, the general climate of tolerance and respect has deteriorated over the last few years, with reports of racially motivated verbal abuse and physical attacks by right-wing extremists and neo-Nazi groups against refugees and other migrants from outside Europe, in particular those of African descent and from Syria, as well as against human rights defenders.

Intercultural education and knowledge about national minorities (Article 12)

8. Several measures have been taken to promote knowledge about the religious groups and persons belonging to them and to foster respect and mutual understanding. Information provided in textbooks and other education materials on the specific identities, cultures, languages and histories of minorities in Cyprus could be further developed to increase the general level of awareness amongst school pupils. There is insufficient information on Gurbeti Roma in educational materials.

Teaching in and of minority languages (Article 14)

9. The authorities continue to promote teaching in and of minority languages. There are different school arrangements for each of the three religious groups, as well as for Gurbeti Roma. The different systems aim to respond to their specific needs, traditions and cultures. More resolute efforts are needed to address the shortage of trained language teachers and to establish opportunities to study and research these at university level. The duration and frequency of language classes of Cypriot Maronite Arabic are insufficient at primary school level. Cypriot Maronite Arabic is not taught at secondary school level.

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

10. Religious groups have observer status in the House of Representatives. Their representatives are elected directly by persons belonging to their respective groups. However, to be registered on electoral rolls, persons affiliating with a specific religious group must provide documentation from the religious authorities, a precondition that may contravene the freedom to hold or not hold religious beliefs and to practise or not practise a religion. Representatives of religious groups are consulted on all matters relevant to their communities and are entitled to take the floor in such circumstances. However, they do not have the right to vote. The appointment of the Co-ordinator of Religious Groups will offer a new opportunity to strengthen co-ordination with the authorities and to allow the religious groups to participate more effectively in the decision-making process. There are no specific institutionalised mechanisms through which persons belonging to religious groups can regularly discuss issues of their concern at the local level, in places where they live. No efforts appear to have been made to promote the effective participation of Gurbeti Roma in public life.

Effective participation in socio-economic life (Article 15)

11. Persons belonging to the Armenian, Latin and Maronite religious groups take an active part in social, economic and political life. Although the *National Strategic Framework for the Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Cyprus Roma 2021-2030* sets horizontal goals that ensure equality, inclusion and participation of Gurbeti Roma in society, they continue to experience difficult living conditions.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

12. The Advisory Committee proposes that the Committee of Ministers make the following recommendations to Cyprus.

Priority recommendations

13. The authorities should take the following priority measures to improve further the implementation of the Framework Convention, along with the implementation of all recommendations contained in this opinion:

- 1) The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to appoint without further delay the Presidential Commissioner and to provide the Co-ordinator of Religious Groups of the Office of the Presidential Commissioner with a broad mandate, with responsibilities for co-ordinating policy making and implementing concrete measures to address the issues faced by the recognised religious groups in Cyprus and persons affiliating with them, as well as to expand its competences to include persons belonging to the Cyprus Roma [para. 49 under Article 4].
- 2) The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to undertake resolute efforts, in co-operation with the relevant representatives of the religious groups concerned, to address the shortage of trained language teachers of Armenian and Cypriot Maronite Arabic [para. 117 under Article 14].
- 3) The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to ensure that a chair of Armenian studies and a chair of Maronite studies are established at the University of Cyprus [para. 118 under Article 14].
- 4) The Advisory Committee reiterates its call to the authorities to ensure full implementation of the right to free self-identification, in particular for married women and children, as protected under the Framework Convention [para. 29 under Article 3].
- 5) The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to publish without further delay the results of the 2021 census data on Cyprus Roma disaggregated by ethnic affiliation, religion, and language [para. 37 under Article 3].
- 6) The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to provide, without delay, suitable training to police officers, prosecutors and judges, on how to make the best use of legal provisions on combating hate crime and hate speech. All cases related to hate crime and hate speech should be effectively investigated and perpetrators sanctioned whenever appropriate [para. 74 under Article 6].
- 7) The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to support independent research regarding Gurbeti Roma to collect data on their culture, religion, traditions, history and language [para. 93 under Article 12].
- 8) The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to increase the frequency and duration of Cypriot Maronite Arabic classes at the primary school level and to gradually extend its teaching at the secondary school level [para. 119 under Article 14].
- 9) The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to ensure the possibility for persons self-identifying as Armenian and Maronite to be registered on the electoral rolls for the election of their respective representatives in the House of Representatives without requiring documentation from the religious authorities as a precondition [para. 127 under Article 15].
- 10) The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to take all necessary measures to implement the *National Strategic Framework for the Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Cyprus Roma 2021-2030*, and to ensure an effective and equal access to public services and social rights [para. 134 under Article 15].

Other recommendations

14. The authorities are invited to take account of the detailed observations and recommendations contained in the present Opinion of the Advisory Committee.

Follow-up to these recommendations

15. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to translate and publish the present opinion into the official and minority languages and disseminate its findings and recommendations widely among all stakeholders.

16. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to organise a follow-up event after the publication of this sixth-cycle Opinion to discuss and identify ways of implementing the recommendations made in this opinion.

MONITORING PROCEDURE

Follow-up activities and awareness-raising related to the recommendations of the Fifth Opinion of the Advisory Committee

17. The authorities indicated several follow-up activities that took place in Cyprus on the implementation of recommendations of the Fifth Opinion of the Advisory Committee. The Opinion and Resolution were published in English on the official website of the Office of the Presidential Commissioner.¹

Preparation of the state report for the sixth cycle

18. The sixth state report was received on 1 February 2024. Organisations representing and promoting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities were consulted in its preparation.

Country visit and adoption of the sixth Opinion

19. This sixth-cycle Opinion on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (hereinafter “the Framework Convention”) by Cyprus 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 sixth state report, other written sources, as well as information obtained by the Advisory Committee from governmental and non-governmental sources during its visit to Limassol and Nicosia from 5 to 8 November 2024.

20. The Advisory Committee expresses its gratitude to the authorities for their excellent co-operation before, during, and after the visit, and to the other interlocutors it met during the visit for their valuable contributions. The draft opinion, as approved by the Advisory Committee on 27 February 2025, was transmitted to the Cypriot authorities on 6 March for observations, according to Rule 37 of Resolution (2019)49. The Advisory Committee welcomes the observations received from the Cypriot authorities on 12 May 2025.

21. 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. The Advisory Committee assesses the situation in the light of the state of affairs prevailing at the time of monitoring.

¹ [Presidential Commissioner | Council of Europe Conventions](#).

ARTICLE-BY-ARTICLE FINDINGS

Scope of application and right to self-identification (Article 3)

22. The Cypriot authorities have maintained their approach regarding the personal scope of application of the Framework Convention.² They consider that the term 'national minorities' within the meaning of the Framework Convention only include the Armenian, Maronite and Latin (Roman Catholic)³ religious groups.⁴ However, the authorities apply the Framework Convention on an-article-by-article basis also to Gurbeti Roma,⁵ despite their formal recognition as belonging to the 'Turkish Cypriot Community'. Due to their constitutional position, Turkish Cypriots are not regarded by the authorities as a national minority.⁶

23. With regard to the territorial scope of application of the Framework Convention, the authorities also reminded the Advisory Committee that they have not been in a position to exercise effective control over all of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus since 1974, and therefore cannot ensure the application of the rights guaranteed in the Framework Convention in the areas outside of their effective control.

24. The Advisory Committee reiterates that "the right to free self-identification contained in Article 3 of the Framework Convention is a cornerstone of minority rights."⁷ On the one hand, parties have a margin of appreciation as regards the personal scope of application to be given to the Framework Convention in order to take the specific circumstances prevailing in their country into account, while the Advisory Committee notes, on the other hand, that this must be exercised in accordance with general principles of international law and the fundamental principles set out in Article 3. In particular, implementation of the Framework Convention should not be a source of arbitrary or unjustified distinctions. "The Advisory Committee has further observed that the *de facto* inclusion of beneficiaries under the protection of the Framework Convention or of certain of its articles often forms part of an evolutionary process that eventually may lead to formal recognition."⁸

25. The Advisory Committee notes that the 1960 Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus is based on a bi-communal system, elaborated to distribute political powers among the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities. As a result, all citizens of Cyprus must belong to either of the two communities to exercise their civic duties and enjoy their political rights, such as the right to vote.⁹ While acknowledging the very complex and restrictive constitutional structure and being aware of the significant obstacles to changing the constitutionally-based obligations of the Cypriot legal order,¹⁰ the Advisory Committee reiterates its position that the classification of citizens into either Greek Cypriots or Turkish Cypriots in all spheres of life does not take sufficient account of the diversity of Cypriot society¹¹ and continues to interfere with the rights of individuals. This is particularly true for women and children, whose right to self-identification is severely limited (see Article 15).¹²

26. The categorisation of 'religious groups' provided for by the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus was a source of concern for representatives of the Armenian and Maronite communities in the fifth monitoring cycle, for being too restrictive, as their distinctive characteristics extend beyond their

² [Sixth state report](#), para. 5. See also ACFC, [Fifth Opinion on Cyprus](#), adopted on 7 November 2019, para. 30.

³ Whilst 'Latin' is officially used in the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus, the Latin religious group prefers to be called 'Roman Catholics' (see ACFC, [First Opinion on Cyprus](#), adopted on 6 April 2001, para. 20). The term 'Latins' will be used in this opinion to refer to this group in this Opinion.

⁴ Article 2, para. 3 of the [Constitution](#) of the Republic of Cyprus.

⁵ Turkish-speaking Roma in Cyprus self-identify as Gurbeti, hence the use of 'Gurbeti Roma' in the Opinion to designate this group. The Advisory Committee is aware of the existence of a numerically small Christian Orthodox Greek-speaking Roma group in Larnaca, known as Mantes or Mantides. However, it did not meet with persons affiliating with this group during the visit. According to academics met during the visit, persons belonging to this group seem to be largely assimilated into the Greek-speaking Cypriot community. This diversity is incorporated under the term "Cyprus Roma."

⁶ Article 2, para. 2 of the [Constitution](#) of the Republic of Cyprus. This opinion uses the terminology of the Framework Convention. In the Cypriot context, the term "national minority" may refer to the "religious groups" as well as Cyprus Roma.

⁷ 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. 9.

⁸ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 4 \(2016\)](#), para. 28.

⁹ See [κεντρική Υπηρεσία Εκλογών](#). It should be noted that according to Article 2, para. 4 of the [Constitution](#) of the Republic of Cyprus, all new citizens have to select one of the two communities within three months upon acquisition of Cypriot citizenship.

¹⁰ The Advisory Committee notes that there have been deviations from the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus following the formulation and the subsequent implementation of the "doctrine of necessity" in the 1964 Supreme Court case [Mustafa Ibrahim and others v Attorney General of the Republic of Cyprus](#). See also European Court of Human Rights, [Aziz v. Cyprus](#) (application No. 69949/01 of 22 September 2004).

¹¹ During the visit, the Advisory Committee could witness the high level of heterogeneity in Cypriot society, both traditional and owing to immigration in recent decades. For instance, several Cypriot citizens affiliating to the Chinese and Vietnamese groups expressed difficulties in classifying themselves as either Greek Cypriots or Turkish Cypriots and called for a recognition of their personal ethnic, linguistic and religious identities as one component of the Cypriot civic identity.

¹² Article 2, para. 7 (a) and (b) of the [Constitution](#) of the Republic of Cyprus indicates that: "(a) a married woman shall belong to the Community to which her husband belongs; (b) a male or female child under the age of twenty-one who is not married shall belong to the Community to which his or her father belongs, or, if the father is unknown and he or she has not been adopted, to the Community to which his or her mother belongs."

religious identities, encompass linguistic, cultural and historical aspects.¹³ During the visit, representatives of these communities informed the Advisory Committee that they would prefer to be officially recognised as ‘national minorities’. However, they expressed their understanding vis-à-vis the lack of progress made toward such recognition, as this may require a constitutional amendment. Furthermore, they indicated that this terminology does not create a serious cause for concern, as they are regularly referred to as “minorities” in the public discourse.

27. The Advisory Committee notes with satisfaction that information in the state report is provided by the authorities on an-article-by-article basis about Gurbeti Roma. Consequently, it welcomes the overall flexible approach to the scope of application of the Framework Convention. The Advisory Committee further notes that despite a historic Jewish presence in Cyprus, Jewish representatives have until now not expressed interest in being considered as a national minority under the Framework Convention.¹⁴

28. With regard to the territorial scope of application of the Framework Convention, the Advisory Committee focused on actions taken by the authorities to implement the Framework Convention in areas under the effective control of the government. The areas beyond the government’s control falls outside the scope of this Opinion. The Advisory Committee notes that steps have been taken to facilitate movement between the government-controlled territory and the northern part of the island, and that the authorities have continued to assist the Maronites in their efforts to maintain contacts with persons affiliating with their group who still live in traditional villages in areas outside the government-controlled territory and to preserve the cultural, religious and historical heritage of these sites.

Recommendations

29. The Advisory Committee reiterates its call to the authorities to ensure full implementation of the right to free self-identification, in particular for married women and children, as protected under the Framework Convention.

30. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to maintain their pragmatic approach to ensure access to rights contained in the Framework Convention to the national minorities, while pursuing flexibility and openness towards groups who are not recognised as national minorities.

31. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to further increase, at all levels, general awareness about the Framework Convention and opinions of the Advisory Committee, to publish them on relevant official public websites in official and minority languages and make them accessible by other means to persons belonging to national minorities.

Census (Article 3)

32. The last population census was held in 2021¹⁵ and was carried out in conformity with the recommendations made by the Advisory Committee during its previous monitoring cycles.¹⁶ Interviews were conducted by specially trained enumerators. The questionnaire¹⁷ was available in seven languages to avoid any language barriers, and it included two non-mandatory questions on “religion” and “ethnic group” and one mandatory question on “language”. Each respondent had the possibility to freely self-declare their “ethnic group” among 27 possible answers (including an open-ended category “other”), with a maximum of two answers.¹⁸ The mandatory question on language was two-fold, asking what language the respondent speaks fluently and also what the respondent’s “native language” is. Gender data was also collected in this context.

33. At the time of the visit, the results of the census were not yet available.¹⁹ The authorities explained the delay in the publication of the census by the change in the original planning due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Representatives of the Statistical Service of Cyprus (CYSTAT)²⁰ further informed the Advisory Committee that a priority was given to publishing data required by Eurostat as of March 2024.²¹

¹³ ACFC, [Fifth Opinion on Cyprus](#), para. 40.

¹⁴ See in this context ACFC, [Fifth Opinion on Cyprus](#), para. 32.

¹⁵ [Census of Population and Housing 2021](#).

¹⁶ ACFC, [Fifth Opinion on Cyprus](#), paras. 54 and 55. See also ACFC, [Fourth Opinion on Cyprus](#), adopted on 18 March 2015, para. 12.

¹⁷ Statistical Service of Cyprus (CYSTAT), [Census of population 2021](#), consulted on 27 November 2024.

¹⁸ The question on ethnic/religious groups has been asked to all those who have resided in Cyprus for the last 12 months, and therefore no longer only to Cypriot citizens, as was the case in the 2011 census. It should further be noted that the question on ethnicity had two separate entries for Cyprus Roma, i.e., “Roma/Gurbeti” and “Roma (Christian Orthodox)”.

¹⁹ The government issued a [press release](#) on the final results of the 2021 census on 9 August 2024.

²⁰ [Statistical Service \(CYSTAT\)](#).

²¹ In accordance with Regulation (EC) No. 763/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 July 2008 on population and housing censuses, the deadline for transmitting the final census data to Eurostat was 31 March 2024.

Data on ethnic group, religion and language from the 2021 Census were published on the CYPSTAT's website on 26 November 2024,²² but no data on the Cyprus Roma population was included. According to the CYPSTAT, their decision not to publish data on the Cyprus Roma population was justified by the fact that some persons belonging to Cyprus Roma refused to participate in interviews with enumerators, claiming, instead, that they were in Cyprus on a temporary basis and did, therefore, not comply with the usual residence requirement" as set out in the regulations.

34. The Advisory Committee reiterates that comprehensive data on ethnic affiliations, including of numerically small minorities, as well as information on first and further languages spoken by the population are a fundamental element for devising and implementing evidence-based and effective policies aimed at protecting minority rights. Such data help preserve and assert minority identities and minority needs and interests. Population statistics should be collected regularly and should be complemented with information gathered through independent qualitative and quantitative research.

35. According to data available from the 2021 Population and Housing Census, out of the three constitutionally recognised religious groups, there were 5 245 Maronites (75% live in Nicosia, 15% in Limassol and 5% in Larnaca), 3 434 Armenians (60% live in Nicosia, 20% in Larnaca, 15% in Limassol and 5% in Paphos) and 301 Latins (50% live in Nicosia, 35% in Limassol, 10% in Larnaca and 5% in Paphos) living in Cyprus.²³ The Advisory Committee further notes that 1 617 persons declared that they affiliate with the Turkish-Cypriot community. Official records of the Gurbeti Roma population do not exist, although it is estimated that there are between 650 and 700 Gurbeti Roma.²⁴ Given the high level of ethnic, linguistic and religious heterogeneity in Cypriot society, both traditional and as a result of immigration in recent decades or "mixed marriages", the Advisory Committee welcomes the fact that the 2021 census questionnaire included non-mandatory open-ended questions on religion and ethnicity, as well as one question on language. However, during the visit, the authorities were not in a position to answer with certainty whether representatives of national minorities were among the enumerators.²⁵ The Advisory Committee considers the inclusion of enumerators from all national minorities communities to be important as, historically, some national minorities, including the Gurbeti Roma, have not been willing to self-identify as explained to the Advisory Committee by its interlocutors.

36. The Advisory Committee regrets that no data were provided on the situation of Cyprus Roma. It strongly considers that the publication of such data are of crucial importance to reduce the growing risk of assimilation that Gurbeti Roma face.

Recommendation

37. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to publish without further delay the results of the 2021 census data on Cyprus Roma disaggregated by ethnic affiliation, religion, and language.

38. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to collect periodically qualitative and quantitative disaggregated data on the situation of persons affiliating with the Gurbeti Roma and Mantides (or Mantides) Roma, in co-operation with their representatives.

Legal and institutional frameworks on minority rights and for combating discrimination (Article 4)

39. The legal framework for preventing discrimination is based on the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus,²⁶ as well as anti-discrimination legislation,²⁷ the Law on Equal Treatment²⁸ and the Law on Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation.²⁹ These laws together prohibit discrimination on the grounds of one's community affiliation, "race", religion, language, sex, political or other convictions,

²² Population and Housing Census 2021 – Language, Religion, Ethnic/Religious group.

²³ ACFC, [Fifth Opinion on Cyprus](#), para. 46.

²⁴ Pelekani C. & Symeou L. (2018), [Civil society monitoring report regarding the implementation of the national Roma inclusion strategies](#), Roma Civil Monitor. The Advisory Committee notes that most of Gurbeti Roma living on the island are settled in the towns of Famagousta, Morphou and Trikomo located in areas which are not under the effective control of the government. It is also estimated that 450 Cypriot Gurbeti Roma live in Limassol and Paphos.

²⁵ The authorities indicate that interviewers from the religious groups may have been hired, although this information is not required to be filled in the application for employment at CYPSTAT.

²⁶ Article 28(2) of the [Constitution](#) of the Republic of Cyprus indicates that: "Every person shall enjoy all the rights and liberties provided for in this Constitution without any direct or indirect discrimination against any person on the ground of his community, race, religion, language, sex, political or other convictions, national or social descent, birth, colour, wealth, social class, or on any ground whatsoever, unless there is express provision to the contrary in this Constitution."

²⁷ [Law 12/1967](#).

²⁸ [Equal Treatment \(Racial or Ethnic Origin\) Act of 2004 59\(I\)/2004](#).

²⁹ [Law 58\(I\)/2004](#) on Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation. These measures have been adopted in the context of the transposition of the Council of the European Union's Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin. Furthermore, the Constitution of Cyprus was amended in July 2006 to give supremacy to EU laws.

national or social descent, birth, colour, wealth, social class, age, disability and sexual orientation or any other grounds,³⁰ and cover both the private and the public sector. During the visit, the authorities further indicated in this context that pre-service and in-service trainings on anti-discrimination legislation is organised for judges, prosecutors, investigators and other legal professionals.

40. In Cyprus, the Presidential Commissioner's office³¹ is the body responsible for providing co-ordination and support to religious groups. It ensures contacts between the three religious groups and the President of the Republic of Cyprus on matters related to education, culture, sports and social cohesion, and secures the President's participation in cultural events.³² On 25 October 2024, the President of the Republic of Cyprus appointed a Co-ordinator of Religious Groups to the Office of the Presidential Commissioner.³³

41. During the visit, the representatives of the three religious groups indicated that this appointment is welcomed. While acknowledging that the situation of religious groups in Cyprus is generally positive, they expressed some dissatisfaction regarding the limited co-ordination with the Office of the Presidential Commissioner in the past years and see this appointment as a new opportunity to strengthen co-ordination with the authorities. However, they expressed the importance of vesting the new co-ordinator with a mandate that includes responsibilities for co-ordinating policy making and implementing concrete measures to address issues faced by the recognised religious groups in Cyprus.

42. The Advisory Committee welcomes this appointment and is of the view that they should be empowered with a mandate entitling them to exercise their mission effectively. In this context, the co-ordinator should be provided with sufficient financial and human resources and their work should be the subject of awareness-raising campaigns aimed at society as a whole. The Advisory Committee deeply regrets however that the Gurbeti Roma are not expected to fall within the scope of the co-ordinator's mandate, and that their concerns will therefore not receive similar attention from the authorities compared to the three recognised religious groups. Such a distinction would constitute an additional barrier to promoting effective equality within Cypriot society and prevent an assessment of the public services provided for Gurbeti Roma and whether these are delivered consistently and effectively.

43. In October 2022, the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights (hereafter the "ombudsperson")³⁴ was re-accredited by the Sub-Committee on Accreditation (SCA) of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions with status A, confirming that the institution is in full compliance with the Paris Principles.³⁵ According to the ombudsperson, the human³⁶ and financial³⁷ resources of the ombudsperson's office have continuously increased and are at a satisfactory level. Furthermore, the ombudsperson considers that the institution is well-known and visible, with various awareness-raising measures, training sessions (e.g. for law enforcement bodies) and campaigns carried out every year.

44. The ombudsperson's office, acting as the equality body, is competent to hear, investigate and decide on individual instances of discrimination brought before it, including the capacity to issue binding decisions, make recommendations and impose small fines on public administration bodies and private

³⁰ See also in this context the relevant provisions of the Criminal Code (Articles 35A, 47(1)b, 51A, 99A, 138 to 142); [Law 134\(I\)/2011](#) Combating Certain Forms And Expressions Of Racism And Xenophobia Through criminal Law; [Law 26\(III\)/2004](#) on the Criminalisation Of Acts Of A Racist And Xenophobic Nature Committed Through Computer Systems.

³¹ The [Commissioner to the Presidency for Humanitarian Affairs and Overseas Cypriots](#) (Presidential Commissioner) is appointed by and directly accountable to the President of the Republic of Cyprus. According to the authorities, the inclusion of religious groups in its mandate is "a testament not only to the equal treatment with the rest of the population on all levels, but also the creation of a useful and always beneficial conduit of communication with the Presidency of the Republic." As of February 2025, the post of Presidential Commissioner is vacant, with a high ranked civil servant in charge of the Office.

³² The Presidential Commissioner co-operates with the representatives of the religious groups at the House of Representatives, the religious leaders, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth and other relevant public institutions towards meeting the needs of persons belonging to the three religious groups and ensuring that their rights are being fully exercised. In practice, issues discussed are related, *inter alia*, to education (curriculum, diplomas, infrastructure maintenance), support for cultural events promoting the identities and cultures of the religious groups and to raise general awareness of the histories, religions, values and contributions of all religious groups to the Cypriot society.

³³ [The President of the Republic appoints a new Co-ordinator of Religious Groups.](#)

³⁴ [Law 42\(I\)/2004.](#)

³⁵ UN, [Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions](#) (Paris Principles), 1993. The re-accreditation was preceded by the adoption of [Law 127\(I\)/2022](#) in June 2022 amending the law regulating the ombudsperson's appointment, by limiting the terms of office to a maximum of two six-yearly terms.

³⁶ The ombudsperson is consulted on all appointments of staff to their office. There are currently 24 permanent staff members, in addition to two officers seconded by another authority and the ombudsperson herself. See also [Sixth state report](#), para. 83.

³⁷ Since 2018, the annual budget for the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights has increased significantly (from €1 777 000 in 2018 to €2 500 000 in 2023). However, the allocated budget concerns all the authorities operating from within the ombudsperson's office, the equality body budget amounting to €600 000.

entities.³⁸ According to the representatives of the ombudsperson, in 2023, 25 complaints were related to language, ethnic origin and/or religious belief, although these were not submitted by persons belonging to the three constitutionally recognised religious groups.³⁹ The ombudsperson's office also informed the Advisory Committee that they have recently reinforced their collaboration with NGOs working on equality issues, establishing a committee aimed at facilitating exchanges and bringing relevant issues to the attention of the ombudsperson.

45. According to several representatives of NGOs that the Advisory Committee met during its visit, individuals who experience discrimination, in particular those belonging to the Gurbeti Roma, asylum seekers and migrants, usually do not turn to the ombudsperson. While these representatives acknowledge that a procedure before the equality body is free of charge and accessible to all, they nevertheless regretted that since 2017 the ombudsperson, acting as equality body, no longer accepts complaints from individuals who are not the victims themselves. Furthermore, they pointed out that the ombudsperson predominantly issues recommendations rather than binding decisions. This undermines trust in the institution among those who experience discrimination and in the effectiveness of the legal remedies available. They also criticised the fact that there is no available data on compliance with the ombudsperson's decisions/recommendations.

46. The Advisory Committee welcomes the fact that the ombudsperson is now in full compliance with the Paris Principles. It also notes with interest that the ombudsperson considers that the institution enjoys sufficient visibility, as well as adequate human and financial resources. The number of complaints lodged to the ombudsperson, acting as an equality body, seems relatively low and might not correspond to the actual number of alleged discriminatory acts committed in Cyprus.⁴⁰ However, the criteria used for determining which complaints are discrimination-related are unclear, and it is not stipulated in the ombudsperson's annual reports whether or not the data provided on the number of complaints were those received or those handled by the office, and in the latter case what the outcome of the investigation was. The Advisory Committee further notes that the ombudsperson, acting as equality body, has not received complaints of alleged discrimination from persons belonging to the Gurbeti Roma.⁴¹ The Advisory Committee welcomes the recent establishment of a committee to strengthen collaboration between the ombudsperson and NGOs. It is of the view that NGOs representing persons belonging to national minorities within the meaning of the Framework Convention should be encouraged to actively participate in this committee. Addressing complaints submitted by individuals, who represent the alleged victims, could also reinforce the capacity of the ombudsperson's office to protect those victims of discrimination, harassment and hate speech who choose to remain unnamed, or victims who are too vulnerable and socially excluded to file complaints themselves.

47. Information collected by the Advisory Committee shows that there seem to be long delays in examining complaints, which may leave victims without a timely redress. This might be a result of the multiple mandates of the ombudsperson⁴² and the absence of staff members allocated exclusively to the equality body. The low number of complaints could be interpreted as an indicator of a lack of public awareness regarding what constitutes an act of discrimination, a lack of knowledge among groups exposed to discrimination of the ombudsperson's mandate as an equality body, and/or a lack of trust in the institution and the effectiveness of the legal remedies available. In this context, awareness-raising campaigns aimed at society as a whole, and in particular at the groups most exposed to discrimination, should be intensified.

48. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee notes that the ombudsperson, acting as equality body, still lacks the right to initiate and participate in court proceedings. However, it understands that courts may

³⁸ By [Law 42\(I\)2004](#), the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights was designated to act as equality body and was given the competence to combat racism and intolerance in both the private and public sectors. For a comprehensive description of competences of the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights, see [Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights](#). See also 2023, [Country report non-discrimination, Cyprus](#), Corina Demetriou (consulted on 15 November 2024) and ACFC, [Fifth Opinion on Cyprus](#), paras. 58-60.

³⁹ Among the different complaints, the ombudsperson pointed out that three cases were based on language, 20 on ethnic origin, two on religious belief. The majority of complaints were directed against the public sector. No case was submitted by persons belonging to the Gurbeti Roma minority.

⁴⁰ In its annual reports, the ombudsperson office provides only basic statistical record. In 2020, the equality body issued a single [activity report](#) for three years (2017, 2018, 2019) without any statistical data. For 2020, the equality body issued an [annual report](#) with a basic statistical record, which included a reference to two complaints regarding discrimination on the ground of 'racial or ethnic origin' but without offering any information as to the content or nature of these complaints. No statistical records were published for 2021 and 2022.

⁴¹ The Advisory Committee notes that over the last 20 years, the equality body has addressed the situation of persons belonging to the Gurbeti Roma only on three occasions: in 2003, in the framework of a self-initiated investigation into their housing conditions; in 2011, with a report on discrimination against Roma children in education and in 2020, with a [report](#) following a self-initiated investigation "on the living conditions of the Roma community in Cyprus".

⁴² The ombudsperson acts, in addition to its role as equality body, as National Human Rights Institution, as the Independent Authority for the Prevention of Torture, the monitoring body for the implementation of the Return Directive and as the monitoring body for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

accept third party submissions or interventions, including by the equality body.⁴³ The Advisory Committee considers that participation of a specialised body in court cases involved with monitoring discrimination would ensure that all relevant standards are duly considered. While welcoming the organisation of some training and awareness-raising initiatives for law enforcement bodies, the Advisory Committee is of the opinion that similar activities could be conducted for the members of judiciary and the Court staff within the judiciary, through awareness-raising measures and the sharing of information on discrimination-related cases. A follow-up to the ombudsperson's recommendations and decisions is also crucial for achieving full and effective equality for persons belonging to national minorities.

Recommendations

49. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to appoint, without further delay the Presidential Commissioner and to provide the Co-ordinator of Religious Groups of the Office of the Presidential Commissioner with a broad mandate, with responsibilities for co-ordinating policy making and implementing concrete measures to address the issues faced by the recognised religious groups in Cyprus and persons affiliating with them, as well as to expand its competences to include persons belonging to the Cyprus Roma. The Co-ordinator of Religious Groups should be equipped with sufficient financial and human resources to effectively carry out its mission.

50. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to take measures which will enable the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights, acting as equality body, to examine and address all complaints related to discriminatory treatment in a reasonable time, and the public authorities to enforce its decisions in due course. The Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights, acting as equality body, should have the possibility to initiate and participate in court proceedings and collect disaggregated equality data, including on compliance with its decisions.

Support for the preservation and development of minority identities, languages and cultures (Article 5)

51. The authorities continue to support various cultural projects of the three recognised religious groups. A scheme regarding 'the support of cultural activities of religious groups' regulates the procedures for organisations representing these groups to submit applications for cultural events and other activities.⁴⁴ Financial support and assistance is regularly provided by the authorities for the publication of books, dance, theatre, music or artistic events and exhibitions, the organisation of conferences, films and video production, as well as academic research.⁴⁵

52. The Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth (MoESY) offers free lessons at the Adult Education Centres in Armenian⁴⁶ and Cypriot Maronite Arabic, in co-operation with the representatives of the religious groups in the House of Representatives. The authorities have indicated that numerous cultural events and activities have been conducted to promote Armenian culture and traditions, including through radio broadcasts and national television. They further indicated that, since 2022, discussions about establishing a Museum of the Armenian-Cypriot group have been taking place. The MoESY continues to subsidise cultural activities, such as the "House of the Latins", a cultural centre, as well as the 'Museovalitsa' project, a mobile museum that travels upon request from school to school throughout Cyprus to familiarise pupils with the history of the Latin group of Cyprus.

53. The Cypriot authorities provide support the Maronites to maintain and develop cultural links with their four historical villages that are located on the territory not under the effective control of the government. In particular, for those wishing to return to their home village, the authorities have launched resettlement programmes in Kormakitis, one of the four villages. The construction of a school and sport facilities, the organisation of summer camps as well as the presence of nurses in this village constitute strong signals aimed at ensuring better living conditions for the Maronites living there, thus preserving and developing their identity, language and culture. However, persons belonging to the Maronite group do not have access to the villages of Asomatos and Agia Marina. The MoESY is supporting efforts to revitalise Cypriot Maronite Arabic⁴⁷ at the Agios Maronas Pre-Primary and Primary School, and a Maronite Sporting Centre has recently been built, in addition to the House of St. Maron, which serves

⁴³ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), [sixth monitoring cycle on Cyprus](#), adopted on 6 December 2022, paras. 1-8.

⁴⁴ During the visit, the authorities indicated that the maximum number of applications is five per year and per religious group, with three levels of funding (70%, 80% or 90% of the total cost). The approved budget for this scheme is €50 000. Although this funding is not earmarked, it has been constantly renewed during the sixth monitoring cycle.

⁴⁵ [Sixth state report](#), paras. 22-29. See also the [Karmela](#) project.

⁴⁶ In the present Opinion, 'Armenian language' refers to the Western standardised modern literary form of the language spoken by Armenians in Cyprus. The 'Eastern Armenian' form is spoken, *inter alia*, in Armenia.

⁴⁷ [Sixth state report](#), para. 95.

as a cultural centre. The Agios Maronas Primary School and the *Nareg* Armenian schools organise several intercultural activities and events on an annual basis, to promote diversity and support, minority languages, identities and cultures. The authorities further emphasised that, in accordance with the *National Roma Strategic Framework 2021-2030*,⁴⁸ they organise activities to celebrate the International Roma Day.

54. During the visit, representatives of the three religious groups, whilst expressing gratitude to the authorities, pointed out the need to strengthen co-operation with the Office of the Presidential Commissioner, particularly through the new Co-ordinator of Religious Groups (see Article 4). They also highlighted the importance of maintaining the relationship with the MoESY and the Deputy Ministry of Culture. Representatives of the Association of Roma and Friends indicated that celebrations are regularly organised, sometimes with support from the MoESY and local authorities, to promote the Gurbeti Roma identity and culture.

55. The Advisory Committee reiterates that “the creation of suitable conditions for persons belonging to minority groups to preserve and develop their cultures and to assert their respective identities is considered essential for an integrated society.”⁴⁹ More generally, the Advisory Committee considers it to be crucial that any initiative aimed at supporting minority cultures and languages reflects the priorities and specific needs and interests of persons belonging to national minorities, keeping in mind the importance of respecting the diversity within minorities and among them. Therefore, the definition of objectives and the allocation of state and regional funding need to be tailored to these priorities, following close consultation with diverse representatives of national minorities.

56. The Advisory Committee welcomes the fact that the support scheme for cultural activities of religious groups, in addition to general publicly available funding opportunities, enables minority organisations to apply for project funding. It also observes that the financial support granted to museums and other cultural institutions contributes not only to the preservation of the national minority cultures but also to raising awareness of these cultures among the majority population. However, the Advisory Committee regrets that the existing scheme dedicated to supporting cultural activities of religious groups has not been expanded to include other groups, such as the Gurbeti Roma, to preserve, raise awareness of and develop their culture.

57. The Advisory Committee notes that the culture, history and religious heritage of the Maronites continue to be significantly threatened by the difficulty, sometimes impossibility, for persons affiliating with this national minority to return to their historical and traditional villages, which are in the territory outside the effective control of the government. In this context, it commends the authorities for their efforts and for the measures taken to facilitate the access and resettlement of persons belonging to the Maronite minority to Kormakitis and Karpashia. Like the authorities, the Advisory Committee deeply regrets that several persons belonging to the Maronite minority do not have access to the villages of Asomatos and Agia Marina, to repair their houses, contemplate their reoccupation, celebrate religious services or organise cultural activities. The Advisory Committee commends the ongoing support given to the Agios Maronas Pre-Primary and Primary School in Nicosia, as well as other initiatives such as the important programme launched to revitalise Cypriot Maronite Arabic (see Article 12) spoken originally in Kormakitis, the recent construction of a Maronite Sporting Centre in Nicosia, and the House of St. Maron, which serves as a cultural centre.

Recommendations

58. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to continue providing a support scheme for the cultural activities of religious groups and to extend this scheme to other minority groups, such as the Gurbeti Roma.

59. The Advisory Committee invites the authorities to effectively address, without further delay, the request from the Armenian group to establish a museum.

Intercultural respect and dialogue (Article 6)

60. According to Eurostat's Migration and migrant population statistics,⁵⁰ there were about 90 500 third-country nationals and another 93 100 European Union citizens living in the Republic of Cyprus as of 1 January 2023, representing 19.9% of the total population. In recent years, asylum seekers and persons

⁴⁸ [Cyprus National Roma Strategic Framework 2021-2030](#).

⁴⁹ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 3, The language rights of persons belonging to national minorities under the Framework Convention](#), adopted on 24 May 2012, para. 25.

⁵⁰ [Governance of migrant integration in Cyprus | European Website on Integration](#).

with international protection⁵¹ have formed a significant proportion of the migrant population, alongside individuals from the Caucasus region and South-East Asia.

61. In April 2024, the government presented a new Action Plan for the Integration and Social Inclusion of Migrants 2024-2026. This plan consists of 50 points based on five pillars: housing, employment, skills, health and education. At the regional and local levels, five districts in Cyprus⁵² participate in Council of Europe/EU regional intercultural networks and have developed specific intercultural integration action plans/strategies that serve as a basis for implementing activities to address the challenges of migrant inclusion. Furthermore, the city of Limassol continues to participate in the Council of Europe intercultural cities network,⁵³ and 15 municipalities across the country have taken part in the “Integration Programmes for Third Country Nationals by Local Authorities” project.⁵⁴

62. The authorities have communicated in the state report several measures to promote identities and cultures of the three religious groups through intercultural activities and events within the education system.⁵⁵ Furthermore, they stressed that the MoESY, in collaboration with the representatives of the religious groups in the House of Representatives, the Presidential Commissioner and the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation (CyBC), produced and broadcast 15 short films/videos on the histories, cultures, languages, and traditions of the three religious groups. In the context of the National Roma Strategic Framework 2021-2030,⁵⁶ the authorities have established enhancing equality, inclusion and participation of the Gurbeti Roma as a social priority, with targeted policy measures in education, housing, health care and social support, as well as in access to services and employment.

63. Several civil society organisations and NGOs have reported a reduced degree of openness towards migrants, third country nationals, as well as Turkish Cypriots living or working in areas under the government's control in recent years. This is manifested within civil society and by the authorities, as well as in different sectors of economic and social life. Despite some progress and awareness-raising efforts by the authorities, prejudice against these groups and persons belonging to them persists in society, with instances of open hostility,⁵⁷ including occasional xenophobic statements from far right political party representatives.⁵⁸

64. The Advisory Committee reiterates that “Article 6 of the Framework Convention explicitly applies to “all persons” living in the territory of states parties. [...]Effective measures must be taken to promote mutual respect, understanding and co-operation among all persons irrespective of their ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identities.”⁵⁹ “Openness and tolerance in society can only be genuine if they are not limited to certain predefined groups but embrace everyone.”⁶⁰ “Article 6(1) explicitly refers to education, culture and the media as particular fields of importance to the objective of promoting tolerance and intercultural dialogue.”⁶¹

65. The Advisory Committee notes that, overall, there is a climate of openness to diversity in Cyprus, with good public awareness of the Armenian, Latin and Maronite religious groups, their histories, religions, values and contributions to the development of Cypriot society. The authorities have also reported that information on the histories and identities of the minority groups has been included in history textbooks, and efforts to raise awareness among pupils and teachers on the issues of tolerance, respect for human rights and diversity have continued (see Article 12). However, despite this positive landscape, Cypriot society remains significantly affected by the unresolved “Cyprus problem.” The Advisory Committee acknowledges the authorities’ efforts over the past few years with respect to the Gurbeti Roma living in government-controlled territories. However, it also notes that the Gurbeti Roma are still facing challenges in accessing housing and health care (see Article 15), and further actions are necessary in these domains to achieve the objectives set out in the National Roma Strategic Framework 2021-2030.

⁵¹ Asylum applicants represent more than 6% of the total population. See [Keynote speech by the Deputy Minister of Migration and International Protection at a panel discussion on “Managing Irregular Migration in Cyprus: Policy, Law and Human Rights in the Buffer Zone and the Sea”, 5th Cyprus Forum](#).

⁵² The Districts of Famagusta, Larnaca, Limassol, Nicosia and Paphos. For more information, see [Intercultural integration in Cyprus - Intercultural cities programme](#).

⁵³ [Limassol, Cyprus - Intercultural City - Intercultural cities programme](#).

⁵⁴ [Local Integration](#).

⁵⁵ [Sixth state report](#), paras. 21-28, 97 and 98.

⁵⁶ [Cyprus National Roma Strategic Framework 2021-2030](#).

⁵⁷ In August 2023 in Chloraka and in September 2023 in Limassol, several inhabitants demonstrated against and attacked migrants and damaged their houses and shops. Several person were injured. In December 2024 and January 2025, different local gangs, attacked robbed and injured migrant delivery boys. The handling of these incidents by the Police Force was criticized and considered inadequate.

⁵⁸ Le Monde, [Migrants in Cyprus fear fresh violence after a wave of racist far-right attacks](#); consulted on 17 December 2024; ARTE, [Cyprus: the breakthrough of the far right](#), consulted on 17 December 2024.

⁵⁹ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 4 \(2016\)](#), para. 51.

⁶⁰ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 4 \(2016\)](#), para. 54.

⁶¹ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 4 \(2016\)](#), para. 59.

66. Over the sixth monitoring cycle, there has been an increase of xenophobic tendencies, racially motivated attacks, and tensions between segments of the local population and migrants. The Advisory Committee regrets that underlying fears of and stereotyping against refugees and other migrants from outside Europe, including Muslims, are reinforced and exploited by some far right politicians for populist purposes. This situation risks damaging the overall climate of tolerance and respect and can have spill-over effects for national minorities. Nevertheless, despite this challenging context, the Advisory Committee notes commendable efforts at the regional and local levels to provide social services for those in need, especially young people and families facing difficulties. It also welcomes the important work carried out by the civil society to build bridges among the various communities living in Cyprus and is of the view that closer co-operation and increased state support for organisations working to defend human rights and the principles of equality and non-discrimination, while respecting their independence of action, could be beneficial in this regard.⁶²

Recommendation

67. The Advisory Committee strongly encourages the authorities to continue their efforts to promote and raise awareness, both in education and through the media, about the positive aspects of intercultural respect and dialogue in Cypriot society.

Combating hate crime and hate speech (Article 6)

68. The legal framework addressing hate crime and hate speech, including online, remains unchanged,⁶³ also with regard to amendments made to Law 134(I)/2011 which abolished the courts' duty to take into account racist and xenophobic bias as an aggravating factor.⁶⁴ For several years, the authorities have developed strategies to respond to racially-motivated incidents. In education, a Code of Conduct for handling racial incidents at schools was published in 2015. A Code of Principles and Ethics for Members of Parliament entered into force in February 2021.⁶⁵ The Code prohibits inter alia hate speech, incitement to violence and sexist/racist behaviour by members of parliament in the performance of their duties. With regard to media, Law No. 197(I)/2021 amended the 1998 Radio and Television Organisations Law and now prohibits the broadcast of content and commercials containing incitement to violence or hatred against vulnerable groups and persons belonging to them.⁶⁶ In law enforcement, a Memorandum of Understanding for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights was signed in 2017 between the Cyprus Police and 15 NGOs to enhance co-operation for the protection and promotion of human rights. Furthermore, liaison officers have been appointed across all districts to inform the Police Human Rights and Combating Discrimination Office⁶⁷ of complaints reported through a specialised template on 'racist offense or incident with racist motive or other related hate offenses'. A questionnaire has also been developed for officers to use as guidance in the investigation of discrimination cases, and additional racism/discrimination materials have been uploaded on the internal portal of the Police. Information leaflets have also been made available on the Police website, under the category of racism/diversity.⁶⁸

69. According to available data collected by the police, there were 203 instances classified as "incidents and/or cases of racial nature and/or with racial motive" between 2019 and 2023. These data do not differentiate between cases of hate crime and hate speech. The police authorities distinguish between incidents which were recorded and those that prompted a criminal investigation. 56 cases reached the indictment level, out of which 11 cases resulted in a conviction between 2019 and 2023. However, it remains unclear to what extent these convictions pertained to incidents of hate speech or hate-crime. To tackle the problem of underreporting of hate incidents, which is acknowledged by the authorities, the police has developed a strategy that includes relevant training and a Code of Conduct to assist police officers in identifying racist motives when interviewing victims and recording incidents.

70. Representatives of several civil society organisations and international organisations, the Advisory Committee met during its visit, indicated that over the last few years, they have witnessed a deterioration in the general climate of tolerance and respect that previously prevailed in Cypriot society. Reports have emerged of racially motivated verbal abuse and physical attacks by right-wing extremists and neo-Nazi

⁶² See for instance the activities carried out by and at [Home for Co-operation](#), established by the [Association for Historical Dialogue and Research](#), which works as a unique community centre located in the UN Buffer Zone in Nicosia and provides working spaces and opportunities for NGOs and individuals to design and implement innovative projects.

⁶³ See ACFC, [Fifth Opinion on Cyprus](#), para. 111. See also ECRI, [sixth monitoring cycle on Cyprus](#), paras. 60 and 66.

⁶⁴ By [Law 30\(I\)/2017](#).

⁶⁵ [Code of Principles and Ethics for Members of Parliament](#).

⁶⁶ [Law 197\(I\)/2021](#), Articles 30(1)(a) and 32 F.

⁶⁷ [Cyprus Police | Crime Combating Department](#).

⁶⁸ 2022, Preservere, [The transposition and implementation of the EU antiracism legal framework in 6 European States: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, and the Netherlands](#), p.88, consulted on 11 December 2024; See also [Sixth state report](#), paras. 100-103.

groups. Particular targets are refugees and other migrants from outside Europe, in particular those of African descent and from Syria, as well as human rights defenders.⁶⁹ They pointed out the reluctance of some police officers to investigate certain cases and to listen to and support alleged victims, especially when those are migrants, and criticised the rarity of instances in which racist hate speech was ultimately sanctioned.⁷⁰ However, hate motivated violence is not as acute a problem as hate speech. No specific cases of racist incidents, hate crime and hate speech were reported by persons affiliating with the three religious groups, or by interlocutors from the Gurbeti Roma.

71. The Advisory Committee reiterates that “Article 6(2) contains the obligation of states parties to protect all persons against violence and discrimination on ethnic grounds, in other words not only persons belonging to national minorities.”⁷¹ “The Advisory Committee refers in this context to other bodies with the specific mandate and expertise to address issues related to racial discrimination and protection from hate crime. It notes in particular the role of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) in assessing the applicability and effectiveness of anti-discrimination tools and mechanisms, whose monitoring work and reports are central for a systematic interpretation of the Framework Convention in an evolving society.”⁷² “Racial motivation must be considered an aggravating circumstance of any offence and 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.”⁷³ Reporting and data collection are dependent not only on victims reporting but also on police authorities and the judiciary’s ability to identify and accurately record racially based incidents.

72. The Advisory Committee welcomes the comprehensive legal framework on hate crime and hate speech, as well as the various training programmes and projects initiated by the authorities. Overall, hate crime and hate speech against religious groups continue to be relatively rare which suggests a high level of respect for national minorities in Cypriot society. However, it remains unclear to what extent courts continue to consider racist and xenophobic bias as an aggravating factor since the amendment was introduced in the Law 134(I)/2011.⁷⁴ Furthermore, the Advisory Committee regrets that neither the prosecution service nor the courts collect data on hate crime and hate speech cases. Establishing a comprehensive system of data collection on discrimination within the judiciary would undoubtedly enhance the effective implementation of existing legislation. Additionally, the Advisory Committee is of the view that the lack of a comprehensive system of legal aid hinders the effective access to justice for individuals in most vulnerable situations.⁷⁵

73. The Advisory Committee also notes the efforts made to rebuild the trust of hate incident victims in police services and strongly encourages the authorities to continue raising awareness about legal remedies available among those segments of society most exposed to hate crimes. The reporting of racist offences will depend on the success of efforts to improve both the investigation and punishment of these offences, as well as on the relationships between law-enforcement officials and the groups most often targeted by hate crimes. In this regard, the Advisory Committee encourages authorities to take note of the relevant Council of Europe recommendations that offer guidance on combating hate crime and hate speech.⁷⁶ The Advisory Committee deplores attacks against human rights defenders and regrets that underlying stereotypes against refugees and other migrants from outside Europe, in particular those of African descent and from Syria are being amplified by some far right politicians. This situation risks damaging the overall climate of tolerance and respect and can have spillover effects on persons belonging to those national minorities which at present are generally treated with respect.

⁶⁹ ENAR, [STATEMENT: Bomb attack targets anti-racist organisation in Cyprus, human rights defenders increasingly at risk in Europe - European Network Against Racism](#); Amnesty International, [Cyprus: 'Despicable' attack against anti-racism NGO KISA highlights rise in racist violence - Amnesty International](#). See also UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and other UN experts, [Cyprus: bombing of the offices of KISA and previous intimidation and attacks against the NGO and its staff \(joint communication\)](#), consulted on 10 December 2024.

⁷⁰ ECRI, [sixth monitoring cycle on Cyprus](#), paras. 60-65.

⁷¹ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 4 \(2016\)](#), para. 55.

⁷² ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 4 \(2016\)](#), para. 58.

⁷³ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 4 \(2016\)](#), para. 56.

⁷⁴ By [Law 30\(I\)/2017](#).

⁷⁵ See: 2022, Preservere, [The transposition and implementation of the EU antiracism legal framework in 6 European States: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, and the Netherlands](#), p. 85, consulted on 11 December 2024.

⁷⁶ Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2024\)4](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member States on combating hate crime; Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2022\)161](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member States on combating hate speech.

Recommendations

74. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to provide, without delay, suitable training to police officers, prosecutors and judges, on how to make the best use of legal provisions on combating hate crime and hate speech. All cases related to hate crime and hate speech should be effectively investigated and perpetrators sanctioned whenever appropriate. The authorities should raise awareness about available legal remedies against hate crime and hate speech, in particular among groups that are most exposed to such actions.

75. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to establish a comprehensive system of data collection relating to discrimination within the judiciary system.

Minority language television, radio broadcasting and print media (Article 9)

76. There have been no relevant changes in the legislation regarding media and broadcasting in minority languages since the last monitoring cycle. According to information provided in the state report⁷⁷ and during the Advisory Committee's visit, news-related reports on the three religious groups are included regularly in the news reporting and general programming of the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation's news (CyBC).⁷⁸ Furthermore, to support and promote the identities and cultures of the religious groups and to raise awareness to the general public about their histories, religions, values and contributions to society, the authorities, in co-operation with the three religious groups, have produced 15 short videos that have been broadcast several times on CyBC Channel 1 and Channel 2.⁷⁹ CyBC has expressed its willingness to broadcast television content of the three religious groups, should they provide them with the relevant programming.

77. Currently, there are no television programmes available in Armenian or in Cypriot Maronite Arabic.⁸⁰ In radiobroadcasting, the CyBC radio station RIK 2 continues to broadcast a one-hour daily radio programme and news bulletin in Armenian,⁸¹ a 30-minute programme for the Latin religious group,⁸² and a weekly 90-minute cultural programme for the Maronite religious group.⁸³ These programmes are elaborated in co-operation with and/or by persons belonging to the three religious groups.

78. Two online magazines are currently available for persons belonging to the Armenian national minority, through a social network (*Artsakank Media*⁸⁴ and *Gibrahayer*).⁸⁵ The latter receives some subsidies from the Cypriot authorities while the former relies exclusively on the contribution from their members or on private donations. These magazines are well-known among persons belonging to the Armenian national minority, across all generations. The Latin national minority also has its own newsletter and social media page,⁸⁶ while persons belonging to the Maronite national minority also have their own publications,⁸⁷ which receive partial funding from the Cypriot authorities.

79. According to the information provided by their representatives during the visit, the three religious groups appreciate the positive attitude displayed towards them in the media and are generally satisfied with their portrayal in the public sphere.⁸⁸ Representatives of the Armenian and Maronite religious

⁷⁷ [Sixth state report](#), paras. 28, 105-107.

⁷⁸ [Αρχική - ΠΙΚ.αυ](#). The content produced for the three religious groups by CyBC's Television and Radio Departments is live-streamed and uploaded on the website on video and audio on demand and on the mobile application.

⁷⁹ The authorities, through the Press and Information Office, the MoESY or the Deputy Ministry of Culture, in close co-operation with the representatives of religious groups in the House of Representatives, regularly publish leaflets and/or informative documents on the situation of the three religious groups. For instance, the Advisory Committee has been informed of the forthcoming publication of a book dedicated to the Melkonian Educational Institute or the recent production of documentaries on the Maronite religious group (*The Cypriot Maronites*) and Cypriot Maronite Arabic (*Sanna – Our language*).

⁸⁰ It should be noted that the television series *Galateia*, broadcast on the private television channel *Sigma TV*, contained Cypriot Maronite Arabic words and phrases incorporated into the Greek dialogues. A project for a new television series (*The Maronite*), supported by the Cypriot authorities, is currently on-going. The TV series would present the real-life story in Kormakitis starting in 1924, through 24 episodes in three seasons, with dialogues made of 70% in Cypriot Maronite Arabic and 30% in Greek.

⁸¹ From 5pm to 6pm (with re-broadcast between 5am and 6am the next morning). This programme covers literature, music, religion, content for children, health and news from Cyprus and the Armenian diaspora worldwide.

⁸² From 4pm to 4:30pm.

⁸³ The radio programme "The voice of the Maronites" is broadcast by CyBC every Friday in Greek, with an excerpt of Cypriot Maronite Arabic, and includes interviews, religious and traditional music and songs.

⁸⁴ [Artsakank Media](#). This online magazine has been established following the discontinuation of the print version of the newspaper *Artsakank*.

⁸⁵ [Gibrahayer EMagazine](#). The magazine is available in Armenian, Greek and English.

⁸⁶ [Latin Catholics of Cyprus](#); [Latin Catholic Community of Cyprus](#).

⁸⁷ The *Maronite Press* is published by the representative of the Maronites in the House of the Representatives, the association Movement for the Relief and Welfare of Maronites publishes the magazine *The Community of Maronites*, and the webpage [Kormakitis.net](#) promotes cultural events and provides updated information on topics relevant for persons belonging to the Maronite national minority. Although these publications are mainly in Greek, they also sometimes use Cypriot Maronite Arabic.

⁸⁸ For instance, representatives of the Armenian minority expressed their satisfaction that the Armenian Christmas and Easter services are broadcast live every year in television.

groups expressed the wish to see some on-demand programmes in Armenian and Cypriot Maronite Arabic available on radio and television, to make these languages more appealing to the younger generation.

80. The Advisory Committee reiterates that “Article 9 and the media-related rights contained in the Framework Convention have a particular significance for the protection and promotion of minority rights. The availability of print, broadcast and electronic media in minority languages has very specific emblematic value for national minorities, in particular for the numerically smaller ones. Through them, persons belonging to national minorities not only gain access to information, but minority language media also raise the visibility and prestige of the minority language as an active tool of communication.”⁸⁹ Media can play a central role in a long-term revitalisation of languages spoken only by a small number of speakers. The Advisory Committee emphasises that without support or incentives for public broadcasting in minority languages, it may be particularly challenging for numerically smaller minorities to establish and maintain a presence in the media sector. Moreover, the Advisory Committee highlights the considerable potential of digital media to make audiovisual productions available in minority languages at a lower cost than traditional media and irrespective of broadcasting hours. To effectively reach the national minority as a whole, media in minority languages should cover a variety of genres (e.g. local and national news, entertainment, culture) and cater different generations.

81. The Advisory Committee considers that the media’s attitude towards the three religious groups is generally positive, as is the public image conveyed about them. Access to radio broadcasting programmes and the availability of online media for persons belonging to these three religious groups are generally satisfactory. Financial support for the purpose of printed editions is examined by the Ministry of Interior upon request by the religious groups. The Ministry of Interior funded the printed version of *Artsakank* until 2020, when the Representative of the Armenian Community informed the Ministry of Interior the publication of the newspaper had ceased. It continues to provide funding for its online version. Regarding television programmes, the Advisory Committee notes that the development of digital media offers wider opportunities for disseminating and providing access to information and quality entertainment programmes, including in minority languages for persons of all generations belonging to national minorities.

Recommendations

82. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to continue ensuring the availability of, and to further develop, through digital media, public television and radio programmes to address the concerns, needs and interests of persons belonging to national minorities, including Gurbeti Roma, as well as to raise awareness about their respective languages and cultures in mainstream programming.

83. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to continue providing support, including financial assistance, to the various print and online media outlets published by and for persons belonging to national minorities.

Use of minority and official languages (Article 10)

84. The second official language of Cyprus, Turkish, is entirely absent from the public sphere.⁹⁰ There have been no relevant constitutional changes in the sixth monitoring cycle,⁹¹ and the use of Turkish in official communications, in public documents or publications such as the Official Gazette continues to depend on the “doctrine of necessity” established by the Supreme Court.⁹² This situation poses challenges for persons belonging to the Gurbeti Roma minority, especially adults, whose first language is Turkish and who do not speak Greek fluently, as well as for the many Turkish Cypriots who commute daily across the green line. Armenian and Cypriot Maronite Arabic are recognised as minority languages protected under Part II of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages,⁹³ in contrast to

⁸⁹ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 4 \(2016\)](#), para. 69.

⁹⁰ However, it should be noted that despite the so-called “doctrine of necessity” (see below), the Cypriot currency edited by the Central Bank of Cyprus bears the name of the country in both Greek and Turkish languages.

⁹¹ Greek and Turkish are the two official languages of the Republic of Cyprus by virtue of Article 3(1) of the [Constitution](#) of the Republic of Cyprus. The authorities reiterate in their [Sixth state report](#) (para. 109) that the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus does not include any references to “bilingualism”.

⁹² 2023, [The Cypriot Doctrine of Necessity and the Amendment of the Cypriot Constitution: The Revision of the Unamendable Amendment Rules of the Cypriot Constitution Through a Juridical Coup D’État](#), Christos Papastylianos, consulted on 16 December 2024.

⁹³ Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, seventh evaluation report on Cyprus, [MIN-LANG \(2024\) 22](#), adopted on 19 November 2024.

Turkish which, as an official language, falls outside the scope of the Language Charter.⁹⁴ English is widely used alongside Greek as the main language of communication, including at local level.⁹⁵

85. The authorities stated in their report that the State Institutes for Further Education⁹⁶ offer scholarships to vulnerable groups of pupils/parents who meet specific educational, social and economic criteria. In this context, free Greek literacy classes were introduced since academic year 2020-2021 for Gurbeti Roma parents to encourage participation in their children's education.

86. The Advisory Committee reiterates that "language rights are effective only if they can be enjoyed in the public sphere."⁹⁷ It "encourages maximum implementation of the possibilities provided by law to allow the use of minority languages in contacts with administrative authorities at local level and in education. Authorities should support and actively encourage such measures by creating an environment that is conducive to the use of minority languages, including through the allocation of necessary financial and human resources."⁹⁸

87. The Advisory Committee is of the opinion that there is a need for developing balanced and coherent strategies to promote the use of Turkish, to encourage respect and mutual understanding within society, but also to help persons belonging to the Gurbeti Roma to maintain and develop their culture, and to preserve the essential elements of their identity, including their language.⁹⁹

Recommendation

88. The Advisory Committee strongly encourages the authorities to increase the use of Turkish in official communications with Turkish-speaking persons, in particular Gurbeti Roma.

Intercultural education and knowledge about national minorities (Article 12)

89. The authorities indicated in the state report that following the 2021-2022 educational reform for the subject of history in secondary education, the histories of the three religious groups of Cyprus have been included in the curriculum for the second year of Gymnasium (lower secondary level) and second year of Lyceum (upper secondary level).¹⁰⁰ Additionally, various activities are being carried out to raise awareness about the identities, cultural heritage and histories of the three religious groups.¹⁰¹ Several publications dedicated to the three religious' groups in Cyprus are being produced, updated and printed and widely circulated by the Cypriot Press and Information Office¹⁰² (see Article 6).¹⁰³ Among the various projects, the *Archive of Oral Tradition for Cypriot Maronite Arabic* project, established by the MoESY, and the *KARMELA* project¹⁰⁴ represent significant academic value. These initiatives aim to collect data on cultures, religions, traditions, histories, as well as languages to describe the life and experiences of the three religious groups and persons affiliating with them over the past century. These data are being analysed and processed by the research team of the *KARMELA* project of the University of Cyprus¹⁰⁵ to make them accessible to the academic community, the general public and persons belonging to the religious groups themselves. The state report further mentions that the Agios Maronas Primary School, in co-operation with the *Nareg* Armenian schools, organises several intercultural activities and events annually to promote diversity, minority languages, identities and cultures.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁴ See for instance [Third periodical report](#) submitted by the Cypriot authorities to the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority languages, 2011, p. 7.

⁹⁵ See for instance the [website](#) of the municipality of Limassol, available in Greek, English and Russian, or the [website](#) of the municipality of Paphos, available in Greek, English, French and Russian. Turkish, however, is not used.

⁹⁶ [State Institutes of further Education](#).

⁹⁷ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 3 \(2012\)](#), para. 51.

⁹⁸ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 3 \(2012\)](#), para. 58.

⁹⁹ The Advisory Committee welcomes that the ombudsperson office responds in Turkish to all correspondence that is addressed to it in Turkish.

¹⁰⁰ According to the authorities, pupils are asked to explain when and under what conditions the Armenian, Maronite and Latin religious groups settled in Cyprus and to learn about their contribution to the socio-economic and cultural development of the state and society. In addition, the high school curriculum examines the change in the demographic composition of the religious groups from the time they settled in Cyprus, as well as the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus for the religious groups of Cyprus, such as the election of a representative of each religious group into the House of Representatives, but also the rights of religious groups.

¹⁰¹ For instance, the Frankish Period of Cyprus (1192-1489) is presented to pupils through *Museovalitsa*, a mobile museum that includes replicas of exhibits, such as a ring, a crown, a map, a dress, a cloth banner with the Lusignan coat of arms, a decorative pin, and is transported to all schools in Cyprus upon their request.

¹⁰² [PIO](#).

¹⁰³ [Sixth state report](#), paras. 21-28, 97-98 and 107.

¹⁰⁴ [Karmela](#) project.

¹⁰⁵ See [The Research Team - KARMELA](#).

¹⁰⁶ [Sixth state report](#), paras. 97-98.

90. During the visit, most interlocutors of the Advisory Committee expressed their overall satisfaction regarding the level of public knowledge about the three religious groups in Cyprus. However, some reported that information on the identities, cultural heritage, languages and religions of persons belonging to national minorities in textbooks and teaching materials in mainstream education could be further developed. They also highlighted the need for more extracurricular activities for pupils and teachers, in addition to the activities already taking place. They underlined that greater support for research on national minority cultures and histories and minority languages at the university level is needed, including the establishment of study programmes and chairs for Armenian and Cypriot Maronite Arabic at the University of Cyprus. A similar request for the establishment of a chair was made by Gurbeti Roma interlocutors who met the Advisory Committee during its visit.

91. The Advisory Committee reiterates that “curricula and educational materials [...] must aim to value diversity, nurture respect for difference, and seek to develop analytical and critical thinking skills. [They] are therefore key to raising awareness of national minorities and persons belonging to them.”¹⁰⁷ “Curricula and educational materials should also take into account the diversity within minority communities [with a view to] avoid the perpetuation of negative stereotypes, including those related to gender, myths or falsehoods about national minorities, while combating prejudice, superficial or oversimplified images and folklorisation of minorities and persons who affiliate with them.”¹⁰⁸ “Pre- and in-service training for teachers, supported with suitable teaching materials, should be provided to ensure that educational policies are effective in practice. [...] Teacher training about national minorities should be ensured by the relevant authorities for all teachers.”¹⁰⁹ “Teachers at all relevant stages should also be trained on human rights, including minority rights.”¹¹⁰

92. With the exception of the Cyprus Roma, the Advisory Committee acknowledges the efforts mentioned in the state report to promote knowledge of national minorities and persons belonging to them and to foster respect and mutual understanding through different initiatives promoting intercultural education. In this context, the Advisory Committee particularly welcomes the launch of the *KARMELA* project, and the ongoing support of the *Archive of Oral Tradition for Cypriot Maronite Arabic* project, both of which present valuable educational perspectives. The Advisory Committee is of the view that similar independent research is needed at the university level for the Gurbeti Roma, to better understand their historical presence, current situation and needs and interests. All pupils in Cyprus, regardless of their place of residence, should have a basic understanding of the different communities and diversity living in the country. However, the Advisory Committee regrets that information provided in textbooks and other educational materials regarding the specific identities, cultures, languages and histories of minorities in Cyprus is still inadequate, remaining too succinct and not translating into an actual increase of general awareness among school pupils. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee considers that greater efforts should be made to include information within the school curriculum and educational materials about the Gurbeti Roma and their distinct cultural heritage and history in Cyprus, in line with the *National Roma Strategic Framework 2021-2030* (see Article 6).¹¹¹ Establishing a data collection project similar to those developed for the Armenian, Latin and Maronite religious groups would add significant value in this regard. Nevertheless, the Advisory Committee appreciates the organisation of several intercultural activities and events connecting certain schools aimed at promoting diversity, minority languages, identities and cultures, as well as the efforts made by the authorities to facilitate such exchanges.¹¹²

Recommendations

93. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to support independent research regarding Gurbeti Roma to collect data on their culture, religion, traditions, history and language.

94. The Advisory Committee invites the authorities to continue to develop and provide educational materials that reflect Cyprus’ ethnic and linguistic diversity, and to continue reinforcing the visibility of the histories, cultures and languages of persons belonging to national minorities within the Cypriot education system.

¹⁰⁷ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 1 on Education under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities](#), adopted on 31 May 2024, para. 25.

¹⁰⁸ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 1 \(2024\)](#), para. 26.

¹⁰⁹ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 1 \(2024\)](#), para. 43.

¹¹⁰ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 1 \(2024\)](#), para. 44.

¹¹¹ [Cyprus National Roma Strategic Framework 2021-2030](#), p. 3.

¹¹² [Sixth state report](#), paras. 97-98.

Equal access to education (Articles 12 and 13)

95. The right to education for all children is safeguarded by Article 20 of the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus.¹¹³ In the state report, the authorities stress that the equality of all children enrolled in schools is guaranteed by legislation and relevant regulations.¹¹⁴ The state report outlines numerous actions and measures taken to enforce school compulsory attendance until the age of 15, with the aim of reducing school absenteeism and early dropouts.¹¹⁵ The educational needs of persons belonging to the Armenian and the Maronite communities are supported, primarily through funding of the Armenian *Nareg* schools and Agios Maronas Pre- Primary and Primary School. Funding is also provided to the Agios Antonios Primary and Secondary schools for children belonging to the Gurbeti Roma, where Turkish Cypriot and bilingual teachers are employed to facilitate the delivery of teaching and learning (see Article 14).¹¹⁶ During the visit, representatives of national minorities informed the Advisory Committee that pupils and students from these national minorities generally face no obstacles in accessing quality education.

96. Furthermore, the authorities continue to partially subsidise access to private schools for Armenian, Latin and Maronite children as an alternative for those who find the public educational system inadequate for their needs. Specifically, the authorities contribute, in part, to the payment of the tuition fees for students belonging to the national minorities, primarily the Latins and the Maronites, attending the Terra Santa schools in Nicosia and Saint Mary's school in Limassol, two private schools run by Orders of the Catholic Church of Cyprus.¹¹⁷

97. The Advisory Committee reiterates that “in line with Article 12(3) of the Framework Convention, states should promote equal opportunities for access to education for all persons belonging to national minorities at all levels, from preschool to universities, adult and vocational training.”¹¹⁸ The Advisory Committee also reiterates that “ensuring access of all persons belonging to national minorities to quality education means that states need to act resolutely to, inter alia, ensure that all children are duly enrolled in schools and to monitor school attainments, including absenteeism and drop-out rates, literacy, completion of studies, grades, gender disparities, access to higher educational levels and subsequently access to employment.”¹¹⁹ Difficulties encountered – such as physical access to schools and transportation, the socio-economic challenges faced by parents should be addressed in constructive and proactive ways.

98. The Advisory Committee welcomes that all educational needs, including for transportation, the production and procurement of books and teaching materials for pupils belonging to the Armenian and Maronite religious groups and the Gurbeti Roma are largely funded and subsidised by the authorities, specifically by the MoESY. The Advisory Committee recognises that issues regarding school attainment, including absenteeism and drop-out rates, are closely monitored, with alternative measures taken when necessary.¹²⁰ While the Advisory Committee welcomes private initiatives aimed at supporting the education of pupils belonging to the three religious groups, it notes that a significant proportion of the funds allocated by the MoESY to support these groups is used to cover private school fees for secondary school students, and it regrets that despite this public funding, the learning of or instruction in minority languages is not offered in these private schools.

Recommendation

99. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to continue ensuring that the right to equal access to quality education is guaranteed for all children belonging to national minorities.

¹¹³ Article 20 of the [Constitution](#) of the Republic of Cyprus.

¹¹⁴ [Sixth state report](#), paras. 59-69.

¹¹⁵ [Sixth state report](#), paras. 66-69.

¹¹⁶ These two schools continue to participate and benefit from the “School and Social Inclusion Actions+” project co-funded by the EU European Social Fund.

¹¹⁷ Terra Santa and Saint Mary's schools are private non-profit schools. These schools receive an earmark funding of €1 196 at the primary level and €2 734 at the secondary level for each pupil belonging to the Latin and the Maronite religious group and €760 for each pupil belonging to the Armenian religious group.

¹¹⁸ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 1 \(2024\)](#), para. 49.

¹¹⁹ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 1 \(2024\)](#), para. 50.

¹²⁰ Students between the ages of 15 and 16 who have dropped out of formal education programs before completing their compulsory education (lower secondary education) have the opportunity to attend the Preparatory Apprenticeship programme.

Teaching in and of minority languages (Article 14)

100. The authorities continue to support teaching in and of minority languages. Different educational arrangements exist for each of the three religious groups, as well as for the Gurbeti Roma, aiming to address their specific needs and interests, but also to make it possible to express their cultures, languages and traditions.

101. Armenian has been a medium of instruction in pre-school, primary and lower secondary education for many years. The *Nareg* Armenian schools, which are open to all pupils in Cyprus, function as public schools with special status in Nicosia, Limassol and Larnaca. These schools are entirely funded by the government and enjoy a degree of autonomy since its governing body, the *Nareg* school board, appointed by the state, is comprised of persons belonging to the Armenian national minority chosen from a list drawn up and put forward by the Armenian representative in Parliament.¹²¹

102. The pre-school *Nanor Armenian Childcare Centre* in Nicosia operates exclusively in Armenian and currently hosts 14 children from four months to three years old.¹²² Children aged from three to six can receive education exclusively in Armenian in the *Nareg* kindergarten and pre-primary schools of Nicosia, Larnaca and Limassol.¹²³ The *Nareg primary schools* of Nicosia, Larnaca and Limassol are currently attended by 127 pupils¹²⁴ aged between six and 12. These primary schools do not follow the public curriculum and have developed their own programme in addition to this, which is taught in Armenian. Since 2020, Armenian language instruction has been provided 45 minutes per week in a primary school of Paphos, for two groups of pupils.¹²⁵ The *Nareg Gymnasium* in Nicosia offers a three-year lower secondary level curriculum,¹²⁶ after which students continue their secondary education in public schools. During the school year 2024-2025, 27 pupils are enrolled, with four pupils commuting daily from Larnaca. Information received during the visit shows that there are parents from Limassol who have expressed an interest in enrolling their children in the *Nareg* Gymnasium of Nicosia, but who are deterred by the distance and the lack of public transportation. The representative of the Armenian religious group informed the Advisory Committee that some pupils face challenges once they transition to Greek language education in the upper stages of secondary level education.

103. Since September 2021, Armenian has also been taught at the upper secondary level in the Archbishop Makarios III Lyceum in Nicosia, a public school.¹²⁷ The programme includes Armenian language and literature in all three grades of the Lyceum.¹²⁸ In the first year, Armenian is taught three or four sessions per week (depending on the semester), for 45 minutes each. In the second and third (last) year, Armenian is taught for four sessions per week, each lasting 45 minutes. Armenian is also offered in the Adult Education Centres of the MoESY, where, since 2023, the lessons are offered on demand free of charge. Moreover, the *Nareg* schools promote the Armenian identity in extra-curricular activities, such as Armenian dance and music lessons. The possibility of converting the *Nareg* schools to full-day schools is currently being considered.¹²⁹ Every July, for four weeks, *Nareg* schools organise a summer school, accommodating 30 children aged three to 12, with the opportunity for playing, learning and interacting in Armenian.¹³⁰

104. The MoESY funds the purchase of books for teaching of the Armenian language, history, geography and religion. Teaching materials in Armenian are imported from Lebanon, Greece and the United States of America. These materials are revised in Cyprus, to ensure relevance to the local context, particularly where the history and the heritage of Armenians in Cyprus are not sufficiently covered. During the visit, the representative of the Armenian religious group indicated to the Advisory Committee that it is more difficult to obtain textbooks for scientific subjects in Western Armenian.

105. While the establishment of a chair of Armenian studies at the University of Cyprus has been a long standing request from persons belonging to the Armenian religious group, no such chair or study

¹²¹ The MoESY allocated €1 204 854 last schoolyear for the operational expenses of the *Nareg* schools, based on the budget presented by the school board.

¹²² The *Nanor* Childcare Centre is partly financed by the Office of the Armenian Representative and the MoESY (€20 000).

¹²³ According to the school personnel met during the visit, there were 47 pupils in 2023-2024 in total (35 in Nicosia, eight in Larnaca and four in Limassol).

¹²⁴ According to the school personnel met during the visit, there were 127 pupils in the school year 2023-2024 in total (87 in Nicosia, 17 in Larnaca and 23 in Limassol).

¹²⁵ Pupils are aged from five to eight and nine to 20 respectively. The MoESY finances the programme with approximately €5 000 per year.

¹²⁶ Equivalent to the first three years of Greek secondary schools.

¹²⁷ This possibility has been offered after a [decision](#) of the Council of Ministers on 2 September 2021.

¹²⁸ Students are exempted from religious education and French. It should however be noted that, as of 2024-2025, students enrolled in the Armenian language and literature programme can attend French lessons free of charge at State Institutes of Further Education in the afternoon.

¹²⁹ According to interlocutors met during the visit, a full day school would offer the possibility to finish classes at 4pm, allowing pupils to increase the time learning and using the language through different extra-curricular activities (sport, dance and music lessons, theatre, etc.).

¹³⁰ The *Nareg* Summer schools are partly financed by parents and the MoESY.

programme currently exist.¹³¹ According to the authorities, the promotion of study and research of Armenian history, culture and language at the University of Cyprus is promoted in other ways, for instance, through the *KARMELA* research project (see Article 12), which aims to facilitate opportunities for researchers to conduct a comprehensive thematic and linguistic analysis of Western Armenian in collaboration with the *Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales* in France. Furthermore, Western Armenian is presented at the *Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* as a case study under the category of diasporic minority languages in the course “Minority Languages of Eastern Mediterranean”, with extensive reference to the history and current socio-linguistic situation of the Armenian diaspora in Eastern Mediterranean countries and beyond. The *Department of History and Archaeology* of the University of Cyprus makes several references to the Armenians of the diaspora and/or the Armenian minority of Cyprus.¹³²

106. In-service Armenian language teacher training is conducted twice a year in the *Nareg* Armenian schools in Nicosia with the financial assistance of the MoESY, enhancing teachers’ awareness of opportunities of language learning methodologies and teaching methods.¹³³ While the shortage of teachers remains a challenge, three teachers from Lebanon have recently been appointed, and the Armenian school board is actively involved in recruitment. According to the representative of the Armenian religious group, a project is currently under consideration to establish a European Union Erasmus programme for teachers from Cyprus, France, Greece and Lebanon.

107. Cypriot Maronite Arabic continues to be an endangered minority language amid ongoing revitalisation efforts of the MoESY, which allocates funds from its budget for this purpose.¹³⁴ At the Agios Maronas pre-primary and primary school in Nicosia, a fully state-funded institution with a curriculum similar to all public schools, Cypriot Maronite Arabic is taught once per week for 45 minutes as an optional course during the afternoon timetable.¹³⁵ During the school year 2024-2025, 33 pupils are enrolled in this optional course and receive language education from a native teacher, who commutes from Kormakitis, where he works as a full-time teacher in the recently opened Kormakitis Primary School.¹³⁶

108. During the visit, speakers of Cypriot Maronite Arabic expressed interest in increasing the frequency and duration of the classes and lamented the ongoing shortage of qualified teachers for the language. Although four teachers in the Agios Maronas Primary School affiliate with the Maronite group, none of them are trained to teach the language. Nevertheless, they raise awareness and promote Cypriot Maronite Arabic and its culture through everyday school activities. Cypriot Maronite Arabic is not taught at the secondary school level.¹³⁷ With the financial support of the MoESY,¹³⁸ an annual summer camp (“the Sanna camp”) is organised every August for one week, accommodating about 100 children, with half of them staying at the camp and half (the younger ones) commuting daily to Kormakitis. The possibility of further increasing the duration of the summer camp to four weeks and converting it to a summer school is being considered by representatives of the Maronite group. The MoESY also provides, upon request, free teaching of Cypriot Maronite Arabic at adult education centres.

109. New teaching materials were produced and approved by the Curriculum Development Unit of the Pedagogical Institute of the MoESY, based on the recent codification of the Cypriot Maronite Arabic language.¹³⁹ A1 level teaching materials and a printed textbook are used for pupils aged from six to 13, attending weekly afternoon classes.¹⁴⁰ Textbooks for the A2 level for both children and adults, as well as an illustrated story book featuring narratives from the Archive of Oral Tradition for Cypriot Maronite

¹³¹ Cypriot authorities have been examining this possibility and according to the information received, 250 to 300 hours of teaching programme would be needed, including a language teaching part and a pedagogical part.

¹³² For instance, in the module “*Modern Greek and Cypriot History: History of Cyprus (1878-1974)*”, references are made to the different phases of the Armenian immigration to Cyprus between 1915-1922, the Armenian presence in Cyprus during the British rule or in the respective module for the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus of 1960.

¹³³ The training sessions are organised one week per semester by Western Armenian native speakers from Lebanon. The cost of these trainings is budgeted in the yearly budget of the school and fully financed by the MoESY.

¹³⁴ The MoESY also finances the operational costs of the five buses transporting the pupils to the school.

¹³⁵ Although pupils follow the public-school curriculum in Greek, the latter is enriched with issues associated with Maronites’ history, religion and geography.

¹³⁶ According to the information received, this teacher is currently the only qualified teacher of Cypriot Maronite Arabic in Cyprus. The relevant legislation concerning the appointment of teaching staff for the Kormakitis Primary School is being revised by the MoESY, to recruit Maronite teachers who reside in the village.

¹³⁷ However, students studying at the secondary education level can participate in the annual Sanna camp.

¹³⁸ During the visit, the MoESY informed the Advisory Committee that it is providing a financial support of €12 750 per year. The MoESY also supports financially the Summer Programme for young Maronites operated by the Maronite Church Committee in Limassol (€6 000), as well as the Summer Programme for young Maronites operated by the Office of the Maronite Representative in Kormakitis, in the Kormakitis Centre for Co-operation (€5 000).

¹³⁹ In the context of the Action Plan for the Revitalisation of the Cypriot Maronite Arabic and the creation of the *Archive of Oral Tradition for the Cypriot Maronite Arabic*.

¹⁴⁰ The new “Sanna book” that was designed according to the guidelines of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) took into consideration the specificities of an endangered language of oral tradition. The book refers to cultural elements of the Maronite religious group.

Arabic are in the process of publication. Furthermore, preparation of teaching materials for pre-school children is underway. However, during the visit, teachers have expressed to the Advisory Committee the need for additional teaching materials.

110. Cypriot Maronite Arabic is not taught at university level, and no chair of Maronite studies has been established at the University of Cyprus. The authorities report that as of October 2020, an online course in Cypriot Maronite Arabic for students and recent university graduates has been funded by the University of Cyprus. Since fall 2022, this course has been offered through the Language Centre of the University of Cyprus and is subsidised by the University of Cyprus. The study and research of Maronite history, culture and language at the University of Cyprus is further promoted through the *Archive of Oral Tradition of Cyprus Maronite Arabic* project.

111. The existing general shortage of qualified teachers of Cypriot Maronite Arabic is of significant concern to the authorities, and the recruiting of new teachers is a priority for coming years. In this context, the MoESY, in co-operation with the Office of the Representative of the Maronites in the House of Representatives, emphasises the importance of teacher trainings. Training courses are organised annually by the University of Cyprus during the Annual Summer Language camp in Kormakitis. They aim to equip native speakers or those with strong proficiency in Cypriot Maronite Arabic with the necessary background knowledge in language teaching and pedagogy to fulfil their roles as teachers for children and youth during the camp.¹⁴¹

112. Most of the pupils belonging to the Gurbeti Roma attend the Agios Antonios Primary School and Agios Antonios Secondary School in Limassol. Measures taken to address their needs include the teaching of the Gurbetcha dialect, a Cypriot variation of Turkish,¹⁴² as well as additional Turkish language courses offered in the afternoon programme.¹⁴³ The departments of primary and secondary education of the MoESY have recruited two Turkish Cypriot teachers, one for primary and one for secondary education for Turkish instruction and bilingual teachers to help bridge the language barrier stemming from the low proficiency in Greek by the pupils. Several extra-curricular activities are also provided to promote the Gurbeti Roma identity.¹⁴⁴ However, no research is carried out at university level regarding this group.

113. The Advisory Committee reiterates the high importance of quality teaching in national minority languages, including those of numerically smaller minorities, in order to ensure that persons belonging to national minorities can effectively preserve their languages and national minority identity. "To develop minority language skills as an added value for their speakers as well as society, there must be continuity in access to teaching and learning of and in minority languages at all levels of the education system, from pre-school to higher and adult education."¹⁴⁵ As the availability of higher education in minority languages is an important precondition for the long-term vitality of minority languages, the authorities need to take measures, where necessary, to reintroduce university courses for the training of teachers qualified to teach minority languages, to stimulate students to follow such courses and to promote the recruitment of teachers of minority languages. With regard to teaching materials, "it is important that the content and language used are tailored to the specific needs of the minority groups concerned, including as regards specific minority language terminology of technical subjects and that priority should be placed on materials produced in the country. Materials developed in neighbouring states may also be approved and made available where appropriate."¹⁴⁶

114. The Advisory Committee commends the authorities for their substantial support in the education sector for persons belonging to national minorities, and more particularly in guaranteeing the teaching in and of their respective minority languages. It notes the ongoing and considerable efforts made by the authorities to support the teaching and learning of Armenian, in co-operation with representatives of the Armenian national minority, from pre-school to lower secondary school levels, and welcomes the recent inclusion of Armenian language instruction at the upper secondary level. However, the Advisory Committee regrets the absence of a chair of Armenian studies, despite long-standing requests from the Armenian minority. The shortage of teachers remains a critical issue that requires the involvement and

¹⁴¹ The training addresses the following issues: teaching an endangered language; Description and analysis of Cypriot Maronite Arabic structural properties, orthographic rules, standardisation of writing; teaching methodology and didactics, language teaching and technology. The training is fully subsidised by the MoESY. The possibility of introducing a new scheme for further training of teachers of Cypriot Maronite Arabic is currently being considered.

¹⁴² [Sixth state report](#), paras. 69. See also ACFC, [Fifth Opinion on Cyprus](#), para. 51, footnote 38.

¹⁴³ During the visit, the Advisory Committee was also told that pupils of the Agios Antonios Primary School and Agios Antonios Secondary School also benefit from more teaching hours (six hours per week) and appropriate teaching materials to learn Greek as a second language, in line with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

¹⁴⁴ Such as theatre, dance, street art, poetry recital, and sports events after school hours. The school unit is also implementing projects that involve all children where the diversity of each separate group of children, including the Gurbeti Roma, is respected. Such activities include video recording of poems, songs and other cultural elements, the organisation of multi-cultural food festivals and the celebration of the International Roma Day in various ways, such as presentations, dances and songs.

¹⁴⁵ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 3 \(2012\)](#), para. 75.

¹⁴⁶ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 3 \(2012\)](#), para. 77.

positive minded support of all relevant authorities, including the Ministry of Interior, as several teachers are recruited from Lebanon along with their families.

115. The Advisory Committee notes the measures taken by the MoESY, in co-operation with the Maronites, to revitalise Cypriot Maronite Arabic. Nevertheless, the language continues to be endangered. The various initiatives supported by the authorities, such as the development of teaching materials and textbooks, are significant steps and commendable. However, the Advisory Committee considers that the teaching of minority languages as optional subjects does not sufficiently encourage minority pupils to learn their first language while pursuing their studies. The number of instructional hours is inadequate for the developing of full language competences. In this context, recruiting new teachers is of utmost importance. A predictable professional career cycle with adequate job security and financial stability are needed, along with more regular and appropriate training organised within a long-term and clearly defined strategy to ensure that teachers advance their skills according to modern language learning methodologies. Furthermore, additional financial support is necessary to extend the duration of the summer camp and expand its activities into a summer school. The establishment of a chair of Maronite studies at the University of Cyprus would further ensure the perennity of Cypriot Maronite Arabic.

116. The Advisory Committee welcomes the opportunities for pupils belonging to the Gurbeti Roma to attend the Agios Antonios Primary School and Agios Antonios Secondary School in Limassol, where several measures have been implemented with the support of the authorities to cater to their needs. These include a methodology for teaching Greek as a second language, which ensure that persons belonging to the Gurbeti Roma gain full proficiency and are offered with possibilities of equal participation in society, access to higher education and employment opportunities. The Advisory Committee is also of the view that further research and study should be conducted at the university level regarding the situation of the Gurbeti Roma, their history, culture and language.

Recommendations

117. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to undertake resolute efforts, in co-operation with the relevant representatives of the religious groups concerned, to address the shortage of trained language teachers of Armenian and Cypriot Maronite Arabic.

118. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to ensure that a chair of Armenian studies and a chair of Maronite studies are established at the University of Cyprus.

119. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to increase the frequency and duration of Cypriot Maronite Arabic classes at the primary school level and to gradually extend its teaching at the secondary school level.

120. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to consider providing transportation for students from Limassol wishing to be enrolled in the *Nareg* Gymnasium of Nicosia.

121. The Advisory Committee invites the authorities to consider converting the *Nareg* schools into full day schools, to enhance the learning and use of Armenian through different extra-curricular activities.

122. The Advisory Committee invites the authorities to explore opportunities for additional financial support to extend the duration of the Maronite summer camp and to convert it into a summer school.

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

123. In accordance with Article 109 of the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus, religious groups have a constitutional right to be represented at the House of the Representatives. When registering on the general electoral rolls, Cypriot citizens have the possibility to declare their affiliation with a specific religious group (Armenian, Latin, Maronite). This administrative declaration, pending the production of a document prepared by the respective Church of each religious group, allows individuals to be included on the electoral list and to vote twice (once for the general election and once for their religious group representative at the House of Representatives). Once elected, the representatives of the Armenian, Latin and Maronite religious groups become observers. They are consulted on all matters relevant to their respective communities (religion, culture and education) and are entitled to take the floor in such circumstances. However, they do not have the right to vote.

124. During its visit, the Advisory Committee noted that representatives of the religious groups expressed divergent opinions on whether they should have the right to vote in the House of

Representatives.¹⁴⁷ However, they consider that they should be able to express the views of the religious groups on all matters. One representative informed the Advisory Committee that compared to other members of the parliament their access to several working documents used by certain commissions of the House of Representatives has been restricted since the installation of a new electronic database system. The representatives of the three religious groups also welcome the recent appointment of a new Co-ordinator of Religious Groups to the Office of the Presidential Commissioner, viewing this as an opportunity to strengthen co-ordination with the authorities and to play a more effective role in the decision-making process (see Article 4). However, at the local level, there are no specific institutionalised mechanisms through which persons belonging to national minorities can discuss on a regular basis issues of their concerns with local authorities and participate in decision-making.¹⁴⁸

125. The Advisory Committee reiterates that “the participation of persons belonging to national minorities in electoral processes is crucial to enable minorities to express their views when legislative measures and public policies of relevance to them are designed. Bearing in mind that state parties are sovereign to decide on their electoral systems, the Advisory Committee has highlighted that it is important to provide opportunities for minority concerns to be included on the public agenda.”¹⁴⁹ “In order to ensure that a guaranteed seat arrangement contributes substantially to effective participation, it is important that the minority representatives elected are effectively involved in decision-making processes. Moreover, they should have a real possibility to influence decisions taken by the elected body, including those not strictly related to national minorities. It is therefore important that they have speaking and voting rights in the elected body and that their role is not limited to a mere observer status.”¹⁵⁰ The Advisory Committee reiterates that it considers that the existence of an institutional partner for minority organisations within the government is essential to ensure that the needs and expectations of persons belonging to national minorities in various sectors are heard and taken into account when decisions relevant to them are adopted.¹⁵¹ Finally, the Advisory Committee reiterates that “in addition to national structures, regional and local consultative mechanisms have, in some circumstances, proved to be a useful additional channel for the participation of persons belonging to national minorities in decision-making.”¹⁵²

126. The Advisory Committee welcomes the ongoing dialogue between representatives of the three religious groups in the House of Representatives and the ministries and services involved, in particular the Ministry of the Interior and the MoESY. While noting that representatives of the religious groups have diverging views on whether they should enjoy the right to vote and the scope of its remit, the Advisory Committee considers that their competences should be strengthened to provide them with the possibility to express the positions of the religious groups on all matters and to enjoy access to working documents to the same extent as other members of the parliament. The Advisory Committee further regrets that no efforts appear to have been made to promote the effective participation of the Gurbeti Roma in public life. In this context, the new Co-ordinator of Religious Groups within the Presidential Commissioner Office should be empowered with a clear mandate to serve as an effective channel of communication between the government and all national minorities, including the Gurbeti Roma (see Article 4). Additionally, the Advisory Committee notes that the possibility for persons belonging to religious groups to be registered on the electoral roll to participate in the election of their respective representative to the House of Representatives is subject to the production of a document from the religious authorities, a precondition that may contravene the right to free self-identification (see Article 3), but also the freedom to hold or not hold religious beliefs and to practice or not practise a religion. In local areas where persons belonging to national minorities live in substantial numbers, the authorities might consider establishing specific institutionalised mechanisms through which these individuals could regularly discuss their concerns with local authorities and participate in decision-making. Lastly, the Advisory Committee refers to the authorities and all relevant stakeholders to the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on the active political participation of national minority youth, which contains useful guidelines for mainstreaming the participation of young persons belonging to national minorities into consultative and elected bodies.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ One representative of the religious group considers that the right to vote could have a detrimental effect for religious groups. Another representative considers that they should enjoy the right to vote for matters of importance for religious groups, for instance in education, culture, extra patrimonial rights while the third representative stresses that religious groups should have the right to vote on all matters.

¹⁴⁸ During the visit, the Advisory Committee was informed that some persons belonging to religious groups are sometimes being elected, but not on behalf of religious groups or for representing their interests.

¹⁴⁹ ACFC, Thematic Commentary No. 2, [The effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs](#), adopted on 27 February 2008, paras. 80 and 81.

¹⁵⁰ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 2 \(2008\)](#), para. 93.

¹⁵¹ Also see in this context ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 2 \(2008\)](#), para. 105.

¹⁵² ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 2 \(2008\)](#), para. 115.

¹⁵³ See [Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the active political participation of national minority youth](#), adopted on 4 October 2023.

Recommendations

127. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to ensure the possibility for persons self-identifying as Armenian and Maronite to be registered on the electoral rolls for the election of their respective representatives in the House of Representatives without requiring documentation from the religious authorities as a precondition.

128. The Advisory Committee strongly encourages the authorities to strengthen the competences of the Armenian and Maronite representatives in the House of Representatives to provide them with the possibility to express the positions of the religious groups on all matters and in particular those impacting their needs and interests.

129. The Advisory Committee invites the authorities to consider the possibility, in areas where persons belonging to national minorities live, of setting up a specific institutionalised mechanism through which these persons could regularly discuss issues of their concern with the local authorities and take part in decision-making.

Effective participation in socio-economic life (Article 15)

130. In the state report,¹⁵⁴ the authorities stated that the Social Welfare Services of the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare, in the context of the European Union framework on the integration of Roma, prepared the *National Strategic Framework for the Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Cyprus Roma 2021-2030*. This sets horizontal goals to ensure the equality, inclusion and participation of Gurbeti Roma in society, with five thematic sections on education, employment, housing, health and social support.¹⁵⁵ More specifically, regarding housing conditions, the authorities reported that the vast majority of Gurbeti Roma families reside in houses owned by Turkish Cypriots, that are provided by the Turkish Cypriot Property Management Office,¹⁵⁶ which is also responsible for their renovation. In Limassol, vocational classes continue to be offered to young individuals belonging to the Gurbeti Roma, with the assistance of dedicated social workers who are combating early school dropouts.¹⁵⁷

131. During the visit, persons belonging to the Gurbeti Roma invited the Advisory Committee to witness their living conditions and shared personal experiences regarding obstacles they faced in accessing public services, in particular access to healthcare. They also indicated that they are still facing challenges in finding employment or benefiting from social rights to which they were previously entitled, but which are now contingent upon a permanent residence requirement.

132. The Advisory Committee reiterates that “in order to promote effective integration of persons belonging to disadvantaged minority groups in socio-economic life, comprehensive and long-term strategies should be designed and implemented.”¹⁵⁸ “Residency requirement problems can also hinder their access to basic social rights, such as healthcare, unemployment services and pension entitlements. Persons belonging to national minorities which have a nomadic lifestyle also face obstacles to participation in socio-economic life when residency-related requirements are not adapted to their lifestyle.”¹⁵⁹

133. The Advisory Committee notes with satisfaction that persons affiliating with the Armenian, Latin and Maronite religious groups are reported to actively participate in the country’s social, economic and political life and generally enjoy satisfactory employment conditions.. However, while acknowledging the efforts undertaken by the Social Welfare Services in the context of the *National Strategic Framework for the Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Cyprus Roma 2021-2030*, the Advisory Committee remains concerned by the living conditions of the Gurbeti Roma, especially in the old Turkish district in Limassol where the majority of the families reside, and the daily challenges they face in accessing employment and basic public services, in particular in healthcare. It is the understanding of the Advisory Committee that a permanent residency is a legal requirement to access basic social rights, and this disproportionately affects persons belonging to the Gurbeti Roma.

Recommendation

134. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to take all necessary measures to implement the *National Strategic Framework for the Equality, Inclusion and Participation of*

¹⁵⁴ [Sixth state report](#), paras. 53-56.

¹⁵⁵ [Cyprus National Roma Strategic Framework 2021-2030](#).

¹⁵⁶ The [Turkish Cypriot Property Management Office](#) is an agency in the portfolio of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Cyprus.

¹⁵⁷ See also [Sixth state report](#), paras. 66-67.

¹⁵⁸ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 2 \(2008\)](#), para. 49.

¹⁵⁹ ACFC, [Thematic Commentary No. 2 \(2008\)](#), para. 54.

Cyprus Roma 2021-2030, and to ensure an effective and equal access to public services and social rights.

Bilateral and multilateral co-operation (Articles 17 and 18)

135. The authorities continue to develop bilateral agreements with the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Lebanon in the fields of education, science and culture. Furthermore, Cyprus, Greece and Armenia signed a Trilateral Memorandum of Understanding on 24 June 2022, with a specific focus on the co-operation among youth and their active participation in dedicated events.¹⁶⁰ Cyprus, Greece and Lebanon also signed a similar Trilateral Memorandum of Understanding on 13 September 2022 on diaspora issues.¹⁶¹ Although no information has been provided regarding bilateral co-operation with other states in the field of Roma policy implementation, the Advisory Committee notes with interest that the authorities participate in the Council of Europe Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (ADI-ROM).¹⁶² On 26 January 2024, the Apostolic Nunciature in Cyprus was inaugurated, and on 16 March 2024, the first Catholic bishop in Cyprus in 500 years was ordained.¹⁶³

136. Informal cross-border co-operation between institutions representing minorities (schools, churches) also continues.¹⁶⁴ For instance, the *Nareg* Armenian schools collaborate regularly with schools in Lebanon and France, and instructors from Lebanon frequently conduct teacher training sessions. The MoESY imports teaching materials in Armenian from Lebanon, Greece and the United States of America (see Article 14). The Agios Maronas Primary School is part of a network of several schools from Greece and the United Kingdom, and there are regular exchanges with a school in Lebanon. Following a proposal from the representative of the Latins in the House of Representatives after a request of the Vicar Patriarchal of the Latins in Cyprus, the MoESY subsidised in part the participation of 21 young people belonging to the Latin religious group in the World Youth Day 2023, which was held in Lisbon (Portugal).

137. The Advisory Committee reiterates that while the primary responsibility for protecting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities rests with the authorities of the state where they reside, bilateral agreements as well as informal cross-border co-operation can contribute to the promotion of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, effectively complement the protection measures it takes at the national level and support the development of the infrastructure for national minorities, for example in fields such as the production of educational materials or teacher training.

138. The Advisory Committee notes with interest the various examples of bilateral co-operation that respond to the needs of the Armenian, Latin, and Maronite religious groups, as well as the close contacts that the representatives of the various groups maintain with cultural and educational establishments in countries where kin-communities reside, in particular in Lebanon and Armenia. It further welcomes the benefits of using some of the advanced educational materials available in the respective countries.

Recommendation

139. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to continue bilateral and multilateral co-operation that benefits persons belonging to national minorities.

¹⁶⁰ [Sixth state report](#), paras. 125-126.

¹⁶¹ See: [Ανακοινωθέντα Άρθρο](#) and [Cyprus, Greece and Lebanon sign MoU on Diaspora issues in Beirut](#).

¹⁶² Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (ADI-ROM) - Roma and Travellers.

¹⁶³ [Vatican inaugurates Embassy in Cyprus](#), consulted on 8 January 2025. See also [First Catholic bishop to be ordained in Cyprus in 500 years, KNEWS](#), consulted on 8 January 2025.

¹⁶⁴ [Sixth state report](#), paras. 124-127.

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, English and Turkish.

This opinion contains the evaluation of the Advisory Committee following its 6th country visit to Cyprus.

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