



**Convention on the Elimination  
of All Forms of Discrimination  
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of  
Discrimination against Women**

**Fourth periodic report submitted by Oman under article 18  
of the Convention, due in 2021\*\*\***

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\* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

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



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## I. Introduction

1. The fourth periodic report sets out the progress made by the Sultanate of Oman in empowering women as it relates to the various articles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The report, in its form and content, follows the guidelines regarding the form and content of reports submitted pursuant to the international human rights treaties, including the guidelines for the submission of a common core document and treaty-specific documents (HRI/GEN/2/Rev.6), as recommended by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (para. 64) and taking into account the guidance note on reporting under article 18 of the Convention in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals that the Committee adopted in November 2019.

2. Oman submitted its combined second and third periodic reports to the Committee on 10 March 2016 (CEDAW/C/OMN/2-3). On 18 July 2017, Oman submitted its responses to the list of issues and questions concerning the combined second and third periodic reports (CEDAW/C/OMN/Q/2-3/Add.1). On 3 November 2017, the Committee discussed those reports at its 1548th and 1549th meetings (CEDAW/C/SR.1548 and CEDAW/C/SR.1549) in the presence of a high-level delegation headed by the Minister of Social Development.

3. Following the adoption on 17 November 2017 of the concluding observations of the Committee (CEDAW/C/OMN/2-3), the Sultanate, acting through the Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of the Ministry of Social Development, developed a plan of action to implement the recommendations set out in that document. The plan of action was presented to the Cabinet at its meeting No. 13/2018, which was held on 22 April 2018. The Cabinet reaffirmed the commitment of Oman to its undertakings with regard to the Convention and approved the circulation of the concluding observations of the Committee to the units of the relevant administrative agencies of the State and the judicial and legislative authorities, with a view to taking the necessary measures within a specified time frame and reporting thereon to the Cabinet and the Ministry of Social Development, which are responsible for following up on the implementation of the Convention. In the period 2018 to 2021, the Ministry communicated with other ministries and government and private entities in order to follow up on the measures that they have taken to implement the recommendations. Those measures were reviewed at Cabinet meetings and the meetings of the Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention, which is chaired by the Minister of Social Development and includes among its membership experts and advisers, as well as executives from the relevant ministries and agencies.

4. On 9 May 2019, Oman presented an update to its common core document (HRI/CORE/OMN/2019) as part of the reporting process relating to human rights treaties and conventions, including, inter alia, the Convention, as well as in response to the guidelines referenced in paragraph 1 of this document and the request concerning the submission of an updated common core document that the Committee on the Rights of the Child made in paragraph 76 of its concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Oman (CRC/C/OMN/CO/3-4). In preparing the updated common core document, Oman strived to involve a broader array of ministries and agencies, as well as representatives of civil society organizations.

5. The Committee, in its concluding observations (paragraph 62), requested Oman to provide, within two years, written information on the steps taken to implement the recommendations contained in paragraphs 10 (a), 16 (a), 24 (a) and 40 (b) of the concluding observations. In response to that request, the Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention of the Ministry of Social Development submitted

a response in 2020 (CEDAW/C/OMN/FCO/2-3) through diplomatic channels. The Committee received that response on 25 March 2020. Oman subsequently received the response of the Committee, adopted at its seventy-sixth session in July 2020, in which it assesses the response of Oman. Feedback on the concluding observations is provided in the relevant parts of this report.

6. Oman adopted a participatory approach in the preparation of the report. Working groups comprising members from ministries and various entities (governmental and private) were formed, and the participating teams took part in a training programme. The Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention supervised the preparation the report, and it held technical meetings with the specialized teams. The draft report was discussed in a workshop in which specialists and members of the Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention participated. The observations made at that workshop were incorporated into the report, which was then presented to the members of the National Committee for Family Affairs. The names of the members of the Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention and of the members of the working groups from the relevant ministries and authorities are listed in annex I.

## II. Principal areas of concerns

### Withdrawal of reservations

7. The Committee noted that Oman had entered a reservation with regard to article 15 (4) of the Convention. In that connection, Royal Decree No. 3/2019 was promulgated ratifying the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention. The second article of that Royal Decree stipulates the withdrawal of the reservation to article 15 (4) of the Convention. The instrument of ratification of the withdrawal of the reservation to article 15 (4) was deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 5 February 2019.

### Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

8. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is one of the international obligations to which Oman has subscribed. Oman strives earnestly to assess the progress made in implementing its twelve strategic objectives and actions related to women. Accordingly, in 2019, it submitted a report on the extent to which the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has been implemented, and it also submitted national implementation reports in relation to Beijing+10, Beijing+15, Beijing+20 and Beijing+25. There have been remarkable developments with regard to women's empowerment, and the Government has set many goals to reduce the gender gap in many areas. In addition, it has made great strides towards achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

### 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

9. Oman has devoted special attention to achieving the goals and objectives of the Agenda for Sustainable Development as part of its five-year development plans. To that end, it formed a high-level national committee on the Sustainable Development Goals headed by the General Secretariat of the Supreme Planning Council (currently the Ministry of Economy). Women are among the membership of that committee, which includes various government agencies and civil society institutions. The ninth five-year development plan (2016–2020) included a set of sectoral goals related to the Sustainable Development Goals, and the relevant authorities have been instructed to make the Sustainable Development Goals one of their priorities in the implementation of their five-year development plans. Those authorities were given a

set of responsibilities, the most important of which are following up the processes of integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into the objectives of the five-year development plans of the State and into Oman Vision 2040, and overseeing the development of an integrated system that is based on measurement indicators with a view to periodically monitoring indicators of progress made towards attaining goals and objectives and ensuring that they are realized in accordance with national goals. The first voluntary national report on the Sustainable Development Goals was prepared and discussed in July 2019. In addition, the Unit to Monitor Implementation of Oman Vision 2040 was established by Royal Decree No. 100/2020. There is an office in every government unit to monitor implementation of Oman Vision 2040, and a working team from the National Centre for Statistics and Information monitors and measures the sustainable development indicators and the related institutional framework, as well as the methodology for preparing the report. The goals and outcomes of Oman Vision 2040 have been aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and their objectives by the relevant sectors.

10. On 7 and 8 May 2018, the Ministry of Social Development, in cooperation with the Centre for Women of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), conducted a training course on integrating Sustainable Development Goal 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) into national strategies and plans. Some 51 persons from the Ministry of Social Development, government agencies, national committees and members of bodies responsible for implementation of the international conventions (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Convention on the Rights of the Child and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) took part in the course. The integration of that Goal was reflected in the plans of the Ministry for the period 2019–2021.

11. The tenth five-year plan is the first implementation plan for Oman Vision 2040, which comprises 4 themes, 12 national priorities and 75 strategic objectives. The tenth five-year plan (2021–2025) was prepared through a participatory approach that saw representatives from all government agencies and partners from civil society and the private sector take part in working groups, workshops and meetings. A total of 195 events were organized, including workshops and coordination meetings, in which 1,900 persons of both sexes participated. Other elements of the methodology adopted for the plan include, inter alia, results-based management that ties goals to programmes and projects; electronic links between the Ministry of Economy and other agencies, in order to facilitate coordination; a more efficient planning process; and follow-up and evaluation by utilizing smart indicators and putting in place a unified electronic platform to promote accountability.

#### **Data collection and analysis**

12. The Committee, in paragraphs 55 and 56 of its concluding observations, calls for the collection of comprehensive data, disaggregated by sex, age, disability, location and socioeconomic status, in order to assess the progress made towards the realization by women of substantive equality in all areas covered by the Convention. In that connection, Oman, acting through its competent authorities, foremost among them the National Centre for Statistics and Information, has been striving to collect administrative data, disaggregated by sex, from various authorities and has urged them to provide the Centre with such data. The Centre follows up, monitors, provides and updates data relating to the Sustainable Development Goals indicators on a regular basis, develops statistical models in order to discover approaches or estimate unavailable data and provides a gender database. Most of the data that the Centre provides are disaggregated by sex and available to all on the Centre's website and data portal.

13. In order to promote the collection of comprehensive data, the Centre issues special publications on the occasion of Omani Women's Day that include indicators

showing the progress that women have made in various fields and the extent of their participation in various sectors. It also publishes various informational reports on its website, including “Omani women: a prominent and ongoing role in serving the nation in its development journey” (2017) and “Omani women: social statistics series” for 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021.

#### **Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)**

14. Oman has taken many precautionary measures to mitigate the effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on women, families and members of society. In addition to the work of the supreme committee responsible for monitoring developments in the pandemic, various institutions played their roles in response to the pandemic in order to ensure the continued provision of services to the community, and to women in particular, while taking precautionary measures when providing services.

15. Psychosocial support services were offered by telephone during quarantines, in particular at the start of the pandemic, with a view to providing support and mitigating the psychological effects of isolation. The authorities utilized video communication technologies to deliver a series of interactive programmes and activities, and they continued to provide protection services to victims of violence and abuse by offering temporary shelter at Dar al-Wifaq, as well as social, psychological and legal care and support.

16. Government institutions, civil society organizations and the private sector launched many initiatives to mitigate the economic effects of the pandemic on families and individuals. For example, the Central Bank of Oman directed commercial banks to postpone the repayment of bank loans and various lines of credit for all affected persons, without interest and additional fees. Payment of monthly contributions was deferred for beneficiaries of the Public Authority for Social Insurance, and loan payments due to the Rafd Fund for Small and medium Enterprises were also deferred. In addition, the authorities established mechanisms to support entrepreneurs, in particular the owners of small and medium enterprises, and encouraged them to continue operating their businesses while putting in place preventive controls and employing technology in marketing and sales.

17. The authorities ensured that women continued to receive care and services during pregnancy, childbirth and puerperium in health-care institutions. Guidelines were developed for health-care workers on caring for the health of pregnant women, including, in particular, those who had developed COVID-19, during pregnancy, childbirth and puerperium. To monitor the impact of COVID-19 on the mother and her fetus, a special form was developed for monitoring infections during pregnancy and puerperium, and following up on infected woman and their babies. Meanwhile, primary health-care institutions continued to provide family planning services (birth spacing) and infertility treatment services.

18. Mothers were given support so that they could continue breastfeeding. The relevant authorities developed guidance on how a mother who was infected or potentially infected could continue nursing, and the Ministry of Health provided breast pumps with protective equipment and distributed them to infected mothers who did not want or were afraid to continue breastfeeding while they were ill. A hotline was established to provide consultations in gynaecology, obstetrics and breastfeeding and answer women’s questions about COVID-19. Moreover, many awareness-raising activities were conducted, including the issuance of several awareness-raising publications for women.

### **Ratification of other treaties**

19. The Committee, in paragraph 61 of its concluding observations, draws attention to the accession of Oman to human rights treaties and conventions. Oman, in addition to providing information on the legislative framework for human rights in its updated common core document, drew attention to a number of international conventions and treaties that it had ratified as at 2018. Oman has acceded to the following conventions:

- International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, pursuant to Royal Decree No. 44/2020
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, pursuant to Royal Decree No. 45/2020
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, pursuant to Royal Decree No. 46/2020

## **III. Follow-up of the implementation of the Convention**

### **Articles 1 and 2: Definition and commitments to eliminate discrimination**

20. The Committee, in paragraph 11 of its concluding observations, notes that the constitutional definition of discrimination applies only to citizens. In that connection, it should be noted that article 15, paragraph 3, of the Basic Law of the State (new), which was promulgated by Royal Decree No. 6/2021, provides that the family is the foundation of society and is based on religion and national values, and that the State shall strive to ensure the cohesion and stability of the family and inculcate family values. That paragraph also provides that the State shall guarantee the attainment of equality between women and men, care for children, persons with disabilities, youth and young people in accordance with the law, with a view to bringing about equality between men and women. The applicability of that article is general and not restricted to citizens. In addition, article 18 of chapter III, on public rights and duties, makes it clear that life and dignity are rights of every human being, and that the State is obliged to respect and protect them in accordance with the law.

21. The Committee, in paragraph 12 of its concluding observations, recommends that Oman adopt a comprehensive definition of discrimination against women and conduct a comprehensive review of its legislation to ensure compatibility with the provisions of the Convention. With the promulgation of the Basic Law of the State by Royal Decree No. 6/2021, all laws and regulations promulgated must be in line with its provisions. As stated above, the Basic Law of the State explicitly stipulates that the State shall guarantee the attainment of equality between women and men. With regard to the comprehensive review of legislation, it should be noted that the Cabinet adopted a decision its meeting on 16 March 2021 in which it directs the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs to coordinate with the relevant authorities with regard to the promulgation or amendment of laws and legislation. That directive applies to other laws, including the Personal Status Act, the Mediation and Conciliation Act, the Nationality Act, the Social Security Act and other laws. The laws and regulations that must be promulgated in accordance with the provisions of the Basic Law of the State are currently being reviewed in accordance with article 95 thereof, which provides that the competent authorities shall endeavour to promulgate the laws to which the provisions of the Basic Law apply within two years from the date of its entry into force. It should be noted that article 97 provides that no entity in the State may issue regulations, decisions or instructions that contravene the provisions of laws and Royal Decrees that are in force or international treaties and conventions that form part of

the country's law. Accordingly, the competent authorities in Oman strive to enforce the provisions of the Convention because it is considered to be part of the country's law, and they ensure that no regulations, decisions or instructions that contravene its provisions are issued, in keeping with the importance and binding nature of international conventions at the legislative, judicial and executive levels.

22. Article 21 of the Basic Law of the State provides that all citizens are equal before the law and have the same public rights and duties, and that there is no discrimination among them on the basis of sex, origin, colour, language, religion, sect, domicile or social status. Accordingly, most laws promulgated in Oman must observe the principle of equality pursuant to the Basic Law of the State, article 96 of which provides that laws, decisions that have the force of law, royal decrees and regulations must comply with the provisions of the Basic Law of the State.

### **Access to justice**

23. The Committee, in paragraphs 13 and 14 of its concluding observations, addresses women's knowledge of their rights and enhancing women's awareness of their rights and their means of enforcing them. Oman has developed programmes and activities to raise women's legal awareness of their rights. As at the end of 2020, some 1,300 participants had attended 30 workshops, which took place in all governorates, regarding the Convention and women's rights in Omani law. The Oman Human Rights Commission has organized many lectures, workshops and national campaigns on a regular basis in schools, universities and colleges. In that connection, the Commission produced a scientific study in 2020 entitled "Women's awareness of their rights and national mechanisms to protect them from abuse in Oman". The principal findings of the study, which focused on Omani women in the provincial centres of Muscat Governorate, are that Omani women have a high awareness of the areas of national law and legislation related to their rights and a moderate degree of awareness of national laws and mechanisms to protect them from abuse.

24. In 2020 and 2021, the Ministry of Social Development, as part of the activities associated with the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign, launched an awareness-raising campaign under the slogan "Qurri Aynan". The objectives and programmes of the campaign, which ran from November 25 to December 10, were presented in the social media, with a view to rapidly and easily spreading the campaign's message. The principal campaign activities were broadcasting awareness-raising messages in the media, designing educational posters to protect women, disseminating motivational phrases for women and releasing awareness-raising films. Other activities, which were organized in strategic cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) office for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) and private sector institutions, included holding forums for the press, radio and television to discuss the campaign's theme.

25. In order to ensure that the curriculums of educational institutions include lessons on the subject of raising awareness of the rights of the girl child, a programme was developed to raise awareness of and provide educational information about the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Child Act in the context of extracurricular programmes. The programme was rolled out in the 2017/18 academic year for school students, teaching and administrative staff, specialists in children from the child protection committees, social and psychological specialists, and parents. The awareness-raising and educational programme addressed national laws related to the protection of the rights of the child, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Child Act, national child protection mechanisms and protection committees. Another project, on the effect of children's rights laws on the conduct of school principals, was implemented in cooperation with Sultan Qaboos University. The aim of that

project was to identify the extent to which the school community is aware of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Child Act, and to raise the awareness of and train targeted groups with regard to the rights of the child over the course of the 2018/19 school year.

26. Given the role that higher education institutions play, their curriculums incorporate gender equality concepts. This has been achieved through the introduction of courses on the Basic Law of the State, human rights and constitutional law, administrative law, criminal law, civil law, commercial law and general international law. With regard to scientific research, higher education institutions have encouraged their students to conduct research on raising awareness of women's rights and gender equality for their graduation research projects and their master's and doctoral theses.

27. In order to institutionalize legal aid systems and make them accessible to and meet the needs of women, recourse to the judiciary is guaranteed under article 30 the Basic Law of the State, which provides that the right to litigate is protected and guaranteed to all persons; that the law shall set out the procedures and conditions for the exercise of that right; and that the State shall guarantee, to the extent possible, that litigants can easily have access to the judiciary and that cases are decided expeditiously. Moreover, article 28 provides that the accused shall have the right to appoint a person capable of conducting his/her defence during the trial; that the law shall specify the circumstances in which the presence of the accused's attorney shall be required; and that the law shall ensure, for those who do not have financial resources, the means to seek judicial redress and defend their rights. Legal aid is regulated by such laws as the Simplifying Litigation Procedures in Respect of Certain Disputes Act and its implementing regulation, which was promulgated by Council of Administrative Affairs of the Judiciary decision No. 104/2021. In order to expedite the issuance of judgements in cases before courts of first instance and appeal, the authorities issued guidance circular No. 4/2021 on determining the average timelines for hearing of cases and the handing down of decisions and judgments by courts of first instance and appeal. In addition, various laws have been promulgated, including the Juvenile Accountability Act, the Attorneys' Act, the Regulation of Translation Offices Act and the Regulation of the Use of Experts in the Courts Act. Other relevant measures include the adoption of ministerial decisions on legal assistance, as well as the work done by the Oman Bar Association. Moreover, Oman, in its combined second and third periodic reports to the Committee, drew attention to ministerial decision No. 91/2009 issued by the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs setting out the regulations governing the provision of legal aid to indigent persons.

28. The Office of the Public Prosecutor, the Royal Oman Police, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Health and the Oman Human Rights Commission work together to address women's issues, beginning with the receipt by Royal Oman Police officials of reports filed by women. These reports are then investigated by public prosecutors who are qualified to handle such cases and provide victims with protection, if necessary, and place them in the Dar al-Wifaq shelter of the Family Protection Department. In order to facilitate access to the legal authorities, the Office of the Public Prosecutor has created an electronic platform ([eservices.opp.gov.om](http://eservices.opp.gov.om)) that women can use to file complaints and follow up on reports that they have submitted. If there is delay in taking action, the request can be submitted directly to the customer service department or sent electronically via the website.

29. The Sultanate, recognizing the importance of providing training on the Convention, regularly organizes programmes to build the capacity of judicial officials and train judges, prosecutors, legal specialists at the Ministry of Social Development and the members of the Committee responsible for monitoring implementation of the Convention on the principles of the human rights conventions (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Convention on the Rights

of the Child and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) through a cooperative programme operated by the Ministry of Social Development and the Higher Judicial Institute. As at the end of 2021, some 174 persons had participated in the 4 training programmes that were offered.

30. To facilitate access to justice, the courts in Oman provide translators who know the applicant's language, in order to ensure that they can exercise their rights and understand court proceedings. The translators, who take an oath, are either seconded or volunteers. In addition, the courts work with the embassies of several countries to provide translators for cases in which the nationals of that country require such services. Information on the number of social workers and translators in the courts of Oman in 2021 can be found in annex II. According to the relevant judicial and legal institutions, law enforcement officials and legal practitioners in the field of women's rights are not assigned any tasks until they have satisfied certain conditions, the most important of which is to have the required educational qualifications. Please see annex III for information on the number of persons, disaggregated by sex, employed by the courts of Oman in 2021 to perform quasi-judicial functions.

31. In 2019, as part of the effort to study the extent to which national law is compatible with the Convention, a study entitled "Comparing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women with Omani Law" was prepared in cooperation with UNFPA and Sultan Qaboos University. That study was updated in response to the amendments made to the Basic Law of the State and the country's laws, and a second edition was issued in 2021. The first report and the combined second and third reports of Oman, along with related supplementary documents, were published in Arabic and English and made available on the website the Ministry of Social Development, and they were circulated to various government and academic institutions and research centres in the country. The Office of the Public Prosecutor has a monthly time slot on private radio channels that it uses to talk about the latest developments in the law and the most important issues facing society, with a view to spreading legal awareness.

### **Article 3: Development and advancement of women**

#### **National machinery for the advancement of women**

32. The Committee, in paragraphs 15 and 16 of its concluding observations, recommends that Oman provide detailed information on the National Commission for Family Affairs. In that connection, it should be noted that the Sultanate assigns great importance to family affairs. The National Commission for Family Affairs, which was established by Royal Decree No. 12/2007, is chaired by the Minister of Social Development. Members takes a participatory approach to the work of the Committee, which has several competencies. The implementing regulations for the National Commission for Family Affairs were issued pursuant to Ministerial Decree No. 146/2012 and were updated pursuant to Ministerial Decree No. 120/2019. One of the provisions of the implementing regulations concerns the establishment of a technical secretariat to serve as the executive organ of the National Commission. The technical secretariat, which reports directly to the Minister of Social Development and the chair of the National Commission, is tasked with studying various matters related to family affairs, including, inter alia, women's issues and relevant laws and policies. In addition, it encourages the conduct of studies and the presentation thereof at National Commission meetings, which take place three or four times per year.

33. The budget of the National Commission consists of funds allocated by the State from the general budget and, with the approval of the relevant authorities, donations, grants and assistance, as well as contributions from local bodies and institutions, and

revenues from the National Commission's own activities. In the period 2018–2021, the National Commission expanded its efforts to monitor implementation of international human rights conventions and treaties, including the three conventions that the Ministry of Social Development monitors (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Convention on the Rights of the Child and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities). Other ministries and agencies are also responsible for monitoring the implementation of international human rights conventions and reporting thereon. The National Commission is developing a five-year plan that includes, inter alia, reviewing the reports prepared by ministries and governmental and private agencies on their plans, programmes and projects for families, including women, children, persons with disability and the elderly. It will also review and discuss international reports on children, women and persons with disability, as well as reports on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, the plan calls for the National Commission to forge links with Omani women's associations and strengthen cooperation with Arab and international committees, commissions and agencies concerned with family affairs.

34. In order to foster women's participation in sustainable development efforts, the competent authorities, including the Ministry of Social Development, are striving to empower, raise the awareness of and educate women in various social, health, economic, political and legal fields; develop their potential and skills, in order to enable them to participate effectively in development programmes, the affairs of their families and community life; plan and implement programmes for women, and provide the necessary support and training; propose studies and research on women and their role in society; and monitor implementation of the Convention. The Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention, which is a member of several regional and Arab committees for women's affairs, was reconstituted pursuant to Ministerial Decision No. 25/2021. It is chaired by the Minister of Social Development and its membership consists of representatives of the legislative and judicial authorities, the relevant ministries, civil society institutions, the Oman Human Rights Commission and the Women's Committee of the General Federation of Oman Workers. This Committee is responsible for monitoring implementation of the Convention. It meets regularly to discuss reports authored by various ministries and agencies regarding their efforts to promote the status of women. In addition, this Committee promotes greater awareness of the Convention through programmes and activities executed by the Women's Affairs Department and the various other bodies that are represented in Committee, within the budget allocated for such educational programmes.

35. The national strategy for women, the slogan of which is "Enhancing the quality of life", is part of the social action strategy of the Ministry of Social Development for the period 2016–2025. The strategy, which laid the foundations for new social policies based on women's development and strengthening the position of women in the family, takes a human-rights based approach in order to safeguard the rights of women, children and persons with disabilities. It is being implemented in partnership with non-governmental organizations and institutions. Gender indicators are an essential element of strategy's implementation plans.

#### **National human rights institution**

36. The Committee, in paragraphs 17 and 18 of its concluding observations, addresses the situation of the national human rights commission. It should be noted that Oman, in the context of the 2021 universal periodic review, accepted recommendation 136.5 made by the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, in which Oman is called upon to develop the operational mechanisms of human rights commissions and agencies in accordance with the best international standards and the Paris Principles by supporting the promotion of the Oman Human Rights Commission

to “A” status within the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions. To that end, Royal Decree No. 40/2021 was issued. Pursuant to that Decree, the Oman Human Rights Commission was reconstituted to consist of 13 members representing the State Council, Shura Council, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Labour, Environment Authority, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, General Federation of Oman Workers, legal practitioners and three representatives of non-governmental organizations. The term of membership is three years and can be renewed.

37. The Commission reviews the situation of human rights in Oman as it relates to both citizens and residents, and follows up on human-rights-related issues for citizens abroad. It submits an annual report to His Majesty the Sultan on its activities that contains observations and recommendations regarding the human rights situation in Oman. The report is published and distributed to all competent authorities and made available to the general public.

38. One of the basic mandates of the Oman Human Rights Commission is to receive and follow up on communications and complaints regarding human rights issues. It has developed various means to achieve that goal, including: a toll-free telephone number (1970) available 24 hours a day; a system for registering complaints online on the website of the Commission; and a dedicated telephone number (+968 72221966) to receive inquiries and urgent reports. From 2018 to 2021, the Commission received 56 communications, of which 5 concerned the right to health care, 4 the right to family care, 1 the right to family security, 3 the right to the life with dignity and 16 the right to adequate housing. In addition, the Commission received 6 communications concerning bodily integrity, 6 concerning the right to nationality, 1 concerning the right to education and 7 concerning the right to work. It also received 1 communication concerning the provision of legal aid to women and 2 communications concerning both women’s right to movement and women’s right to life with dignity. The Commission received 1 communication concerning a woman’s right to residency and support for obtaining documents.

39. At the international level, the Commission submits shadow reports on the situation of human rights in Oman to United Nations human rights bodies, including alternative reports in relation to the universal periodic review and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

#### **Non-governmental organizations and women human rights defenders**

40. The Committee, in paragraphs 19 and 20 of its concluding observations, recommends that Oman ensure an enabling environment in which civil society organizations may be established and are able submit alternative reports. It also recommends that Oman amend the Civil Associations Act (2000). Article 40 of the Basic Law of the State guarantees the freedom to create national associations, and the Civil Associations Act, which was promulgated by Royal Decree No. 14/2000, sets out the conditions and rules that guarantee the right of persons to create and establish civil societies and enshrines the independence thereof. The Ministry of Social Development has been given the authority to supervise these associations without affecting their independence. Discussions are under way regarding the enactment of a new law that is line with the aspirations of civil society organizations, with a view to strengthening their role and enhancing their ability to contribute effectively to building the country and participate in making decisions related to their fields of work. In that connection, the Ministry of Social Development organized workshops from 14 to 16 February 2022 in order to increase the involvement of civil society organizations in the drafting of the new.

41. Articles 18 and 23 of the Basic Law of the State affirm the right to life, dignity and personal freedom of every human being and that the State is obliged to honour and protect those rights in accordance with the law, while article 35 of the Basic Statute of State guarantees freedom of expression and opinion for all persons, through speech, writing or any other means of expression. In that connection, the laws that regulate the media, printing, publication and the press include provisions and procedures to protect the exercise of that right.

42. In order to ensure the effective participation of women in civil society organizations, article 6 of the Civil Associations Act sets out the legal requirements for the registration of non-governmental organizations that work in certain fields, including fields related to the exercise of certain social rights that affect the public interest, in particular those that relate to women's rights. Under the law currently in force, women can establish non-governmental organizations for women that are free to conduct their activities. That right is established under article 4 of the Act, which defines the fields in which an association can work, one of which is women's services.

43. The Government has simplified the procedures for registering and announcing such associations, in order to encourage the growth of a civil society that plays an active role in development and human rights programmes. At the start of 2021, there were 31 professional associations in Oman, with 8 branches at the governorate level, as well as 31 charitable and civil society associations with 11 branches. At the start of 2021, there were 59 Omani women's associations (of which 5 are branches of other associations), and there were 12 social clubs for foreign communities with 8 branches at the governorate level.

44. On 6 February 2022, the Ministry of Social Development and Dar al-Ata' association signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in several areas, including, most notably, developing women's capacities and potential through participation in women's legal empowerment programmes, enhancing the volunteer-work skills of women members of civil society organizations and helping promote the use of information and communications technologies to empower women and improve their employment opportunities. The memorandum also covers cooperation with regard to family affairs and protection, through the provision of material and social assistance to beneficiaries of Dar al-Wifaq, which is a subsidiary of the Ministry. In addition, the parties agreed to cooperate with regard to social and economic empowerment of families by adopting, implementing and supporting economic empowerment projects for families and persons who receive social security or have limited income; participating in the implementation of marketing and promotional exhibitions for productive families and creating marketing outlets for them; executing joint training and qualification programmes on social and economic empowerment of women who receive social security or have limited income; and providing support to poor families identified by the Ministry.

#### **Article 4: Special measures to accelerate equality**

##### **Omani Women's Day**

45. Omani Women's Day is celebrated annually on 17 October, in order to highlight the status of Omani women and their contribution to development. The commemoration of that day is considered an important achievement for women. His Majesty Haitham Bin Tarik, since assuming the reins of power, has stressed that including citizens in building the country's present and future is a fundamental element of national action, and that the Sultanate strives to ensure women can enjoy the rights they are guaranteed by law and work side by side with men in various fields in service of their country and society. On 17 October 2020, Ahad bint Abdullah al-Bus'aydiyah,

the wife of His Majesty the Sultan, presented the Royal Medal of Commendation to several women on the occasion of Omani Women's Day and honoured 50 other women. In 2021, another group of 50 women were honoured for their noteworthy achievements in various fields. During the ceremonies, the Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel), in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development, inaugurated its *Mubadarah* award, in keeping with its belief that it is important to support the work of Omani women's associations and enhance their members' capacity in respect of empowering women, and to highlight their efforts and the role they play in this vital and important field, with a view to making such associations an effective mechanism for increasing women's participation in public life.

46. The Ministry of Social Development, acting in accordance with the implementation plan for Oman Vision 2040 and within the framework of a package of policies and laws that empower women socially and economically and are consistent with human rights principles, has established a database on Omani women and populated it with data that covers women in all employment settings, women who are self-employed, women who operate home-based businesses and women who are involved in the voluntary private sector. The Ministry, owing to the nature of its work, must deal with many women who work in various specialties and a multitude of sectors, especially when preparing for national events or to participate in local and international conferences and forums on with women in all fields. This database will store, organize and facilitate the extraction of data on Omani women in all fields.

#### **Gender-based approach**

47. As part of the effort to build and develop the capacity of institutions to integrate a gender-based approach into plans and policies, the social action strategy for the period 2016–2025 includes training and qualifications programmes aimed at enhancing the capacity of Ministry of Social Development personnel and partners to include gender indicators in their periodic and annual reports. Training courses on a gender-based approach to the preparation, execution and evaluation of national programmes and plans were organized each year in the period from 2018 to 2021. A total of 173 employees from the Ministry of Social Development, partners in government agencies and the National Centre for Statistics and Information, and members of the Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention and civil society organizations participated.

### **Article 5. Social and cultural stereotypes**

#### **Stereotypes and harmful practices**

48. The Committee, in paragraphs 21 and 22 of its concluding observations, addresses the role and responsibilities of women and men in society and in the family. The social action strategy for the period 2016–2025 calls for the development of fair, family-oriented policies, legislation and programmes that are based on indicators and aimed at supporting the stability and cohesion of families. The social action strategy also calls for the implementation of preventive and remedial initiatives and programmes that promote family cohesion and the positive role that women play, including the continued implementation of the “Tasmuk” marriage counselling programme, the aim of which is to empower and prepare those who are about to get married. The programme strives to provide prospective spouses with the skills and knowledge to successfully face the demands and challenges of marriage, make them aware of the importance of following a sound approach when choosing a partner, raise their awareness of the importance of having a medical examination and doing necessary tests before marriage, and familiarize them with the laws related to the family. In the period from 2018 to 2021, a total of 17,738 persons, of whom 7,408

were men and 10,330 were women, participated in marriage counselling courses. In addition, prospective spouses can benefit from awareness-raising courses provided by private family centres in the various governorates.

49. The Sultanate is taking a series of measures and implementing policies aimed at changing the stereotype of women and correcting cultural misconceptions. The Ministry of Education offers a package of educational guides and awareness-raising programmes aimed at students, parents and society at large. The Oman Scouts and Guides organization, in cooperation with the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, participated in the global “Stop Violence” initiative, as part of which Girl Guides leaders were trained to develop girls’ skills and knowledge, familiarize them with their rights and duties, and teach them new life skills. The first phase of the initiative was launched in September 2021 with the training and qualification of 46 Girl Guides leaders from various governorates as training facilitators. Another 200 Girl Guides leaders will be trained during the second phase, which will take place in 2022.

50. The Committee, in paragraphs 23 and 24 of its concluding observations, recommends that Oman prepare a national study on the prevalence of harmful practices. As we stated in our previous report, article 20 of the Child Act prohibits practices that are harmful to children. Article 4 of the implementing regulation for the Child Act, which was issued by Ministerial Decision No. 125/2019 of the Ministry of Social Development, makes it clear that female genital mutilation is a harmful practice. With regard to the recommendation that the Committee makes in paragraph 24 of its concluding observations, the Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Committee to Monitor Implementation of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women held a joint meeting to review a report on the negative effects of female genital mutilation. That report was subsequently presented to the National Bioethics Committee, which recommended raising public awareness and stressed the importance of integrating and coordinating efforts with the competent authorities and civil society.

51. Female genital mutilation is not practised in government and private health institutions in Oman, and it is not one of the standard operations performed in hospitals. Permits are issued to private health institutions to perform male circumcision only. Accordingly, female genital mutilation procedures cannot be performed at such institutions. The procedure, in addition to being a crime, is prohibited at health institutions.

52. With regard to awareness-raising programmes that are directed at, in particular, parents, teachers, religious leaders, community leaders and education and health-care specialists, Oman, acting through its competent authorities, has intensified efforts to spread awareness in schools in all governorates. To that end, it has developed and issued five manuals and guidelines for school workers and parents on supporting the health of children and adolescents and ensuring their healthy and balanced development. In 2020, guidelines on protecting students against abuse were issued. Those guidelines list various forms and the signs and manifestations of abuse (e.g., sexual, physical and emotional abuse), and provide professional and counselling techniques for social workers and psychologists who work with students and their parents, and strategies for dealing with abusive students and abused students.

53. The minimum legal age of marriage is enforced. The case provided for in article 10 (c) of the Personal Status Act is an exception to the general rule that the minimum age of marriage is 18 years. This exception allows judges to authorize persons who are under 18 to marry. That notwithstanding, the courts, before contracting a marriage, can investigate the minor’s social background with the assistance of social workers and psychologists, with a view to determining that the marriage is not being concluded for the benefit of any party other than the spouses.

With regard to national child marriage statistics, the 2020 census revealed that only 1.08 per cent of persons younger than 18 were married. Moreover, the estimated birth rate for the 10 to 17 age group is 0.86 per 1,000 persons. Data provided by the Ministry of Health confirms that the birth rate for that age group has declined.

54. As part of the national effort to raise awareness of the harmful effects of child marriage, Ministry of Education social workers have been executing guidance and awareness-raising programmes for students of both sexes and the public at large on the legal age of marriage. These programmes, which are being delivered at parent council meetings, orientation classes and panel discussions, include short awareness-raising films on the subject. One of these programmes is the peer educators programme, which is being co-sponsored by the Ministry of Health with the support of the Subregional Office of UNFPA for the GCC countries, the aim of which is to teach positive health values and good conduct to students in grades 7 to 10. From 1996 up to and including the 2019/20 academic year, these awareness-raising programmes have been complemented by the “Facts for Life” book competition in schools throughout Oman. The competition is aimed at grade 10 students, who are asked to prepare a scientific research paper. In the 2018/19 academic year, a total of 9,813 research papers were included in the book, which covers a range of topics related to women’s and children’s health.

55. Oman, acting through the Ministry of Social Development, strives assiduously to monitor implementation of the Child Act and its implementing regulations. It has taken various measures to achieve that aim, including the establishment of committees for protecting children from violence and exploitation. The members of these committees have the status of judicial police officers in relation to the enforcement of the law. Other measures include the establishment of temporary shelters that are responsible for placing abused children in a safe place and the appointment of child protection agents. In order to guarantee the realization of these rights, the Act includes a chapter on civil penalties and compensation. The penalties established by the Act are without prejudice to any more severe penalty that is established by another law. In addition, the Act establishes penalties and compensation that are commensurate with the seriousness of the act and the extent of the harm done to the child, with a view to deterring anyone from committing acts that are detrimental to the rights of children.

#### **Gender-based violence against women**

56. The Committee, in paragraphs 25 and 26 of its concluding observations, addresses efforts to combat gender-based violence against women. In that connection, the objectives of the five-year development plan of the Ministry of Social Development include an item on protection for victims of abuse and violence. The toll-free protection line (1100) was launched in January 2017 as part of the national mechanism for the protection of girls. The line, which is operated by trained and specialized national staff, receives reports and complaints around the clock. The competent authorities (the legislative, legal, health-care and social care authorities and civil society organizations) in Oman cooperate with one another in order to strengthen these national mechanisms and to implement several awareness-raising media programmes that promote the status of women.

57. The Sultanate, acting through the specialized departments of the Ministry of Social Development, in particular the Family Protection Department, protects women victims of abuse by providing them with shelter, care and rehabilitation until their situation stabilizes, and helping them integrate into society. The State also provides them with psychological and legal support, social care and recreational opportunities, and it provides other services to the family, the members of which benefit from guidance and counselling services. In the period 2018–2021, a total of 39 women

were housed in shelters. In addition, the State supports women who have been prevented from marrying. These women can choose to benefit from the services of Dar al-Wifaq or stay with relatives or friends until their cases are adjudicated. Some 123 women were prevented from marrying in the period 2018–2021.

58. The Penal Code, which was promulgated by Royal Decree No. 7/2018, repealed the previous law. A new law was introduced that criminalizes acts that cause material or moral harm to persons, in general, and women, in particular. It also safeguards their rights and addresses prosecution in its articles 253 to 262. The same law establishes heightened penalties for certain crimes committed against women. These are set out in annex IV, which itemizes the legal provisions that criminalize inflicting material or moral harm on women. The Penal Code does not contain any provisions on honour killings.

59. Multiple communication and reporting channels have been established as part of the effort to encourage reporting by women victims of gender-based violence. The relevant agencies coordinate with each other in order to direct women to the appropriate protection and support institution, and they conduct extensive awareness-raising campaigns using traditional methods, which are direct, or technologically advanced methods, which increase reach and facilitate rapid dissemination. Omani women's associations are essential partners in the effort to teach women and make them aware of how to protect themselves.

60. Stakeholders periodically offer capacity-building programmes for judges, prosecutors, police officers and other law enforcement officials on the legal provision concerning violence by reviewing the principles set out in the human rights conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in line with recommendation contained in paragraph 14 of the Committee's concluding observations.

61. In order to ensure that victims in family cases have access to appropriate remedies, the Sultanate, acting through the Office of the Public Prosecution, issued Decision No. 49/2020 in 2020 establishing a dedicated department for family and child cases that is specialized in investigating and litigating domestic violence cases in particular. Several prosecutors with experience in this field were appointed to serve in that department and enrolled in capacity-building programmes on the Convention, the investigation of cases of violence against women and using all means to deliver justice. In the period from 2017 to 2021, five defendants were referred to the courts in cases of violence against women.

62. In order to enhance the support services provided to women victims of violence, Oman has established several of the national mechanisms called for in paragraph 26 of the Committee's concluding observations. It should be noted that, in the governorates, the family development services department of the regional directorates receive and review cases in which women are victims of violence and they provide psychosocial support and rehabilitation programmes, according to the needs of each case, in every governorate.

63. In order to systematically collect data on all forms of gender-based violence against women, the Office of the Public Prosecutor regularly tracks cases of violence against women. The data collected on the types of crime committed in the period from 2017 to 2021 (see annex VI) are disaggregated by age group (see annex VII), status of the accused and his relationship to the victim (see annex VIII) and nationality (see annex IX).

64. The Committee, in paragraphs 27 and 28 of its concluding observations, addresses the issue of women and girls who are victims of sexual abuse. The Penal Code was promulgated by Royal Decree No. 8/2018, which abolished the previous

Penal Code (No. 7/74), protects the rights of women rape victims. Articles 257 and 258 detail all criminalized actions and prescribe severe penalties of up to 15 years imprisonment. The woman in such cases is treated as the victim and given legal protection, regardless of whether she is an Omani national or a foreigner. The penal laws of Oman do not discriminate with regard to the nationality of the victim, because all individuals deserve the legal protection granted to them by the Penal Code.

65. Articles 225 and 226 were repealed and replaced by article 259, which criminalizes engaging in relations without having concluded a marriage contract. The conditions and the basis for initiating charges in relation to this offence differ radically from those for the crime of rape. Each of these offences is defined by different circumstances, which are revealed by the investigation conducted by public prosecutors. It is therefore impossible to convict a woman who is a victim of rape. She is treated as the victim and given legal protection, and it is the perpetrator who is punished. This is done in order to ensure that victims of sexual assault are not punished. Under the Combating Trafficking in Persons Act, the victims in such crimes can exercise their rights and report the incident without hesitation. Women victims enjoy their rights and are treated as victims. They are given health and psychological care until they obtain justice and the offender is punished.

### **Article 6: Combating all forms of trafficking and exploitation of women**

66. The Committee, in paragraphs 29 and 30 of its concluding observations, addresses the effective enforcement of the Combating Trafficking in Persons Act. Oman, acting through the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking, is refining the skills of those who are involved in combating trafficking in persons by organizing training courses and periodic awareness-raising lectures for Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff, diplomats assigned to the embassies of Oman, law enforcement agencies, civil society organizations and international organizations. Following are some of the activities that were organized in the period 2018–2020:

- Best practices in investigation and international cooperation to combat trafficking in persons.
- Develop the capacities of the judiciary and prosecutors in combating trafficking in persons.
- Support the national capacities of law enforcement agencies and first responders in the effort to combat trafficking in persons.

67. As part of the relevant authorities' efforts to promote complementarity and partnership, the Office of the Public Prosecutor, in cooperation with the Embassy of the United Kingdom, delivered six training courses on prosecuting trafficking in persons cases for public prosecutors, judges and specialists from the Royal Oman Police, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the former Ministry of Manpower, in which 103 persons participated. The training courses included a field visit to the United Kingdom, in order to familiarize participants with trafficking in persons laws, investigative mechanisms and how to protect victims of trafficking (2018–2019). In addition, the Ministry of Labour has delivered four training courses on combating trafficking in persons in all governorates, with a view to qualifying Ministry staff. Some 18 employees participated in these courses.

68. The National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking reviewed the previous national action plan to combat trafficking in persons (2018–2020) and took stock of the achievements made. It adopted a new action plan for the period 2021–2023, with a view to developing appropriate solutions and strategies to address, prevent and combat all

forms and manifestations of trafficking in persons and protect victims, in accordance with the Combating Trafficking in Persons Act, which was promulgated by Royal Decree No. 126/2008. Other goals in the new action plan include, inter alia, strengthening regional and international cooperation, drawing on best experiences and practices in combating trafficking in persons, and developing the specialized capacities of monitoring, investigation, response and care agencies through regular training.

69. In order to further enhance community awareness, combat trafficking in persons and protect victims, the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking recently launched its website ([www.nccht.om](http://www.nccht.om)), which is rich in relevant information. In October 2017, it launched the “Ihsan” media campaign to disseminate information about the efforts of the Sultanate to combat trafficking in persons, utilizing various print, audio, visual and electronic media and the Oman News Agency. Other aspects of the campaign included the publication of leaflets in several languages and delivering courses and lectures to groups that are most vulnerable to becoming victims of trafficking in persons. The second round of the “Ihsan” campaign, which was launched in March 2021, lasted for 3 months. Other institutions involved in the effort to combat trafficking in persons have organized parallel media campaigns, including on the occasion of World Day against Trafficking in Persons, which is celebrated on 30 July every year. On that occasion, the Office of the Public Prosecutor used Twitter to share a publication in Arabic and English that contains the texts of all relevant laws.

70. In order to provide greater protection, in particular for women and girls, and ensure that perpetrators of trafficking in persons offences are prosecuted and appropriately punished, the Sultanate, acting through the Office of the Public Prosecutor, established a specialized department to investigate trafficking in persons cases pursuant to Administrative Decision No. 50/2017. The specialized and qualified staff of this department can investigate offences and take action by filing and initiating cases before the courts. In 2019, the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking established a rapid intervention task force, the membership of which comprises representatives of the competent authorities, that conducts proactive investigation in order to enhance the ability to respond immediately to and support victims, in accordance with national mechanisms. Statistics for the period 2018–2021 indicate that 66 non-Omani women victims were taken in by the Dar al-Wifaq shelter of the Ministry of Social Development.

71. In order to strengthen the capacity of the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking, specialized judicial and administrative divisions for trafficking in persons have been established in various law enforcement and other agencies, including the Office of the Public Prosecutor, the Royal Oman Police, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Labour. It is worth noting that the membership of the National Committee includes representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Office of the Public Prosecutor, Royal Oman Police, Supreme Court, Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Information, Oman Human Rights Commission, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the General Federation of Oman Workers.

72. Oman was elevated to tier 2 by the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons of the United States Department of State in the evaluation of the United States Office against Human Trafficking thanks to measures that were taken in the nation’s legislative and legal system and its implementing regulations, which safeguard the freedoms and rights of individuals, and the efforts of the Government.

73. In order ensure that women at risk of being trafficked cannot be found criminally liable and are given support, the provisions of the Combating Trafficking in Persons Act of 2008 guarantee that victims receive free medical care and legal and social

assistance. There is a special shelter for women victims who have been trafficked and exploited in prostitution or served as domestic workers. Stakeholders cooperate with the judicial authorities in order to ensure that offenders are apprehended and brought to justice, and they provide legal support to victims by informing them of the status and details of their cases. In order to ensure that all victims of trafficking obtain effective protection and redress, the country's penal laws apply to all individuals, both citizens and residents, and all individuals are treated equally, regardless of their social background, including with regard to compensation. Victims are given many forms of support, as noted above.

74. The National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking, in order to strengthen its partnership with civil society organizations, signed a memorandum of cooperation in 2018 with the Oman Bar Association regarding the provision of pro bono legal representation before national courts for victims of trafficking in persons, with a view to helping them exercise their rights. The National Committee intends to sign and implement more such memorandums with other relevant organizations. The National Committee has launched an electronic platform ([www.nccht.om](http://www.nccht.om)) that is being used to disseminate information about the efforts of the Sultanate to combat trafficking in persons. The platform is designed to raise awareness of the various types of trafficking in persons (e.g., domestic slavery, sexual exploitation and forced labour) and offer a means of reporting trafficking cases to the competent authorities. In addition to the platform, a hotline was launched for reporting suspected cases of trafficking. Any person can report a suspected case by calling 80077444. The platform is available in 13 languages, in order to help victims trafficking, and voice-based assistance is also available.

75. On 31 May 2020, the Royal Oman Police, in order to continue developing the laws that endow workers in Oman with all their rights and to prevent workers from becoming victims of trafficking, amended certain provisions of the implementing regulations of the Aliens Act. The amendments provide that a foreigner's residency authorization can be transferred from one employer to another employer who is licensed to recruit workers, on condition that proof of the expiration or termination of the employment contract is provided. This change represents an important development in the rights of workers in Oman because they no longer need to provide the "no-objection" certificate that was previously required in order to change employers.

#### **IV. Follow-up of the implementation of the Convention, articles 7–9**

##### **Article 7, equality in political and public life, and article 8, representation at the international level**

76. The Committee, in paragraphs 31 and 32 of its concluding observations, addresses the question of equal and full participation of women in political and public life and decision-making at various levels. The laws of Oman do not discriminate between men and women with regard to nomination for elected positions and election thereto. The Basic Law of the State, which was promulgated by Royal Decree No. 6/2021, in its articles 15 and 21, provides that citizens shall enjoy fairness and equality of opportunity. Article 69 provides that the members of the Council of State shall be appointed by Royal Decree, while article 70 provides that the Shura Council shall consist of elected members representing all governorates of Oman selected by a direct secret vote, in the manner specified by the law. The Council of Oman Act, which was promulgated by Royal Decree No. 7/2021, sets out the conditions for membership of the Council of State and of the Shura Council. The Election of the

Members of the Shura Council Act, which was promulgated by Royal Decree No. 58/2013, sets out the conditions for nomination and election to the Shura Council. Article 23 of that Act provides that every citizen has the right to request that he/she be registered in the electoral rolls and sets out objective conditions in that regard.

77. Royal Decree No. 75/2020, concerning the administrative apparatus of the State, was issued in order to promote the participation of women in political life. Omani women hold 16 per cent of Cabinet posts in the new Government, and 5 have been appointed as undersecretaries of various ministries. Pursuant to Royal Decree No. 77/2019, a total of 15 women were appointed to serve as members of the Council of State during its seventh session (2019–2023). As a result, women make up 18 per cent of its membership. It should be noted that a woman is the Vice-President of the Council of State, and two other women were elected by the membership to the Bureau of the Council. With regard to the specialized committees of the Council of State, both the Technology and Innovation Committee and the Culture, Media and Tourism Committee are chaired by women.

78. With regard to women's representation in the Shura Council, the law gives women the right to stand for election and to be elected to the Shura Council, and they are treated, in that regard, in the same manner as men, without discrimination. The representation of women in the membership of the Council of State is in the hands of voters. Recent data points to an upward trend in the participation of both men and women in elections (see annex X). A total of 637 candidates were nominated for election for the ninth session of the Shura Council (2019–2023). Of that number, 597 were males and 40 were women (see annex XI). Women were elected to two seats on the Shura Council. In addition, data indicate the number of women members of municipal councils for the second session (2016–2020) has increased. Of the 202 elected municipal council members, 195 are men and 7 are women.

79. In order to increase the political participation of women and ensure better results for them in Shura Council elections, and given the role that civil society organizations play in supporting women candidates, the Sultanate, in cooperation with the Omani Women's Association in Muscat, executed a training programme on building the capacities and skills of Omani women in managing the election campaigns of women candidates for membership of the ninth session of the Shura Council (2019–2023). Further training was offered using the training manual entitled "Managing the Election Campaign". A total of 37 women candidates participated in that session. Additional support measures included the preparation and execution of an awareness-raising campaign in the media. Two women candidates were elected and several others did well. Such results show that society at large is aware and understands the importance of women's participation in the electoral process.

80. With regard to promoting women's participation in public life, the results of the 2020 electronic census of population, households and businesses show that women in Oman comprise 31 per cent of upper-, middle- and lower-level government departments. In the private sector, women held 28 per cent of all chief executive positions in 2019. Women ran for membership of the Board of Directors of the General Federation of Oman Workers, and two were elected for period 2019–2023.

81. In order to promote women's participation in the judiciary, the Judiciary Act does not make distinction between men and women in respect of the conditions for becoming judges. Women can apply and compete for judges' posts (see annex XII for gender-disaggregated information on the number of employees in the Administrative Affairs Council of the judiciary, up to 2020). A large number of women work for the Office of the Public Prosecutor. Many of them hold the post of Deputy Prosecutor, while others hold various positions in the hierarchy of the Office of the Public Prosecutor. Those positions are core judicial positions, and the women that hold them

enjoy all the rights and privileges of judges. Article 86 of the Basic Law of the State provides that the Office of the Public Prosecutor is part of the judicial authority, and the Judiciary Act provides that male and female staff members of the Office of the Public Prosecutor can assume the post of judge (see annex XIII for information on the number of women in the workforce of the Office of the Public Prosecutor as at the end of 2021).

82. Women comprise a significant proportion of legal advocates (lawyers), and the number of Omani women working as lawyers has grown. In 2020, some 253 Omani women lawyers were registered with the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs. In 2021, that number had nearly doubled to 491 (see annex XIV for gender-disaggregated information on the number of Omani and non-Omani lawyers registered with the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs in the period 2018–2021).

83. With regard to international representation, Omani women are members of the diplomatic and consular corps. They serve in foreign missions and act as representative in regional and international forums. Two women serve as ambassadors, and 17 women in total have held that position. In 2020, some 50 women held the position of first secretary and 86 the position of second secretary. Women have also served as members of international and regional councils and commissions.

## **Article 9: Nationality**

84. The Committee, in paragraphs 33 and 34 of its concluding observations, addresses the question of ensuring equality between men and women with regard to the acquisition of nationality. The Nationality Act, which was promulgated by Royal Decree No. 38/2014, includes several provisions concerning the status of women, including, in particular, provisions under which Omani nationality is granted to persons born to an Omani mother and an Omani father and who have become stateless, persons born to a foreign mother and whose father is of Omani origin, and persons born to an Omani mother and whose paternity cannot be legally established. In addition, the Act provides that persons born in Oman to unknown parents shall have Omani citizenship, thereby ensuring no one born in Oman is stateless. That provision is in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It should be noted that the Nationality Act does not allow for dual citizenship because of the legal problems that it can cause in the application of the law to individuals who are dual nationals. The conditions by which Omani women can transmit their nationality to their foreign spouses and their children are less restrictive than those in effect for persons who apply for citizenship. Thus, the Act creates a legal advantage for Omani women and their foreign spouses and their children.

85. The children of Omani mothers enjoy various privileges. The Child Act guarantees children the right to nationality at birth and to be recognized and cared for by their parents. The children of an Omani woman married to a foreign man enjoy the same rights as the children of an Omani man with regard to education, health care, scholarships and the opportunity to enrol in higher education institutions, in accordance with certain conditions. Indeed, equality with regard to health care is not restricted to Oman, because the State bears the cost of treatment received abroad. In June 2020, the Minister of Health issued Decision No. 84/2020 promulgating the regulation on medical treatment abroad and in private health institutions. That decision abolished the previous regulation (135/2015). Article 15 of the new regulation stipulates equality of treatment between Omanis and the children of Omani women married to foreigners in respect of the right to receive medical treatment abroad at the expense of the State.

## V. Follow-up of the implementation of the Convention, part III, articles 10–14

### Article 10: Education

86. We turn to paragraph 35 of the Committee’s concluding observations and the recommendations contained in paragraph 36 on making education compulsory and available to all, continuing efforts to ensure that women and girls have access to education on an equal footing with men, and taking measures to challenge traditional gender stereotypes. The Basic Law of the State promulgated by Royal Decree No. 6/2021 provides in article 16 concerning cultural principles that education is a fundamental pillar of social progress that the State must sponsor and universalize. Article 21 concerning gender equality provides for equality between women and men in education. That article is foundational and applies by analogy to all public rights and duties. The State provides public education. It promotes the establishment of schools and academies under State supervision to ensure literacy for both sexes. Annex XV shows the number of schools in Oman during the 2021–2018 period and the number of Government schools disaggregated by sex. Annex XVI shows the percentage of GDP allocated to education in the years 2018–2020 as reflected in the expenditures of the Ministry of Education.

87. In compliance with the imperative to provide equal opportunities in education, the Child Act, article 38, sets forth the objectives to which education in Oman should aspire. Subparagraph (d) stipulates instilling the values of equality among all individuals and non-discrimination on the basis of religion, origin, race, ethnicity, social status or any other potential grounds for discrimination. The Ministry of Education is revising curricula with a view to inculcating knowledge, skills and abilities in line with the needs of the labour market and scientific and technological advancements without discriminating between men and women.

88. To ensure the availability of detailed information, including statistics on education disaggregated by sex and age, the Ministry of Education issues annual statistical reports in which education statistics are disaggregated according to sex and age for both Omani and non-Omani students. Similarly disaggregated statistics are provided in the reports issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information. Annex XVII shows rates of enrolment in Government and private schools by sex and level (primary, secondary and post-secondary education). Annex XVIII shows rates of enrolment in pre-school education by sex for the years 2017–2021. Annex XIX shows rates of enrolment in higher education for 18-22-year-olds for the academic years 2018–2020.

89. These efforts have been reflected in the similar enrolment rates are similar for both sexes. The enrolment percentage in grades 1–4 for males was 101 in the 2018/19 academic year. It fell slightly to 100.4 in the 2020/21 academic year. The enrolment percentage in grades 1–4 for females was 100.1 in the academic year 2018/19. It increased slightly to 100.2 in the academic year 2020/21. The gender equality index for grades 1–4 is therefore about 99 per cent, which is outstanding. Illiteracy rates among Omani females 15 years and up are falling continuously every year, dropping from 10.06 in 2015 to 9.35 in 2019. Annex XX shows literacy rates for men and women as of the year 2020. The Sultanate has seen a decrease in dropout rates in basic education and beyond for the academic years 2017–2020, as can be seen from annex XXI.

90. To ensure age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights in school curricula, curricula and materials for grades 1-12 include topics such as “I protect myself” and “The right way to seek health information”. There is a unit

on adolescent health, a lesson entitled “Individual health”, and another entitled “Family planning and its relation to improved social status”. The unit on the human body includes educational guidelines for the health of all organs. There is a unit on food, digestion and health. There are units on nutrition, respiration and the internal alignment and balance of humans. The unit on diversity and adaptation covers immunity and disease. There is a unit on life processes and technology that includes such topics as the tissues of the human body, body systems, the circulation of blood, and problems caused by blood sugar and fats. There is a unit on human reproduction that covers in detail the reproductive organs, gametes, hormones, sexually transmitted diseases and reproductive technologies. It covers fetal development in humans from fertilization through birth and weaning. There is also a genetics unit that covers human genetic traits, mutations, genetic engineering, biotechnology, and the relevance of biology to various professions.

91. The Ministry of Education has worked to revise all school curricula with a view to presenting male and female roles as mutually supportive and based on equality in rights and duties. Material that discriminates on the basis of gender or contains stereotypes has been removed to ensure a diversity of presentation, images and discourse on both sexes without discriminating between them. The focus is on respect and appreciation for women. Teacher’s manuals and textbooks include illustrations of gender equality and girls engaging in athletic, artistic and musical activities on a par with boys. In fine arts and music curricula, artistic areas are taught at all levels of study according to the age levels of male and female students. There are no artistic fields that are restricted to males and exclude females. Illustrations and learning resources contain no type of discrimination whatsoever, implicit or explicit.

92. In order to promote the ongoing empowerment of women in Omani curricula in both words and images, the social studies curriculum has added a number of topics aimed at enhancing the role and status of women in Omani society. The Arabic language curriculum has added topics on the right to education. Texts from Omani women writers are presented, including poetry, prose and other writings. Pictures, illustrations and names have been added to show women in various educational and cultural contexts taking part in numerous aspects of life. The information technology curriculum for grade 5 has added an activity called “My future profession”. It shows images of women as doctors and airplane pilots. The curriculum for grades 5 and 6 includes pictures that show the essential role women play in helping men protect their children and raising an upright generation that will help society prosper.

93. With a view to continuing training in the field of women’s rights and gender equality, a manual has been developed for professionals who deal with adolescents – social workers, psychologists, counsellors – to help them provide appropriate awareness-raising. Training workshops have been held for teaching staff, a majority of whom are female. Annex XXII shows the number of female teachers in public schools, with their percentages in basic and post-basic education during the academic years 2018–2021.

94. With regard to stepping up efforts to provide girls with career counselling, statistics show that the proportion of females choosing subjects such as mathematics and sciences in secondary education (grades 10–12) is higher than that of males. For the year 2019/20, there were 9,078 females in pure mathematics (53.0 per cent) compared to 8,046 males (47.0 per cent). In chemistry, there were 9,085 females (53.1 per cent) compared to 8,029 males (46.9 per cent). In physics, there were 8,585 females (51.9 per cent) compared to 7,956 males (48.1 per cent). Annex XXIII shows the numbers of students enrolled in and graduating from institutions of higher education disaggregated by sex for the academic years 2018–2020.

95. In order to continue to promote vocational training for women and girls, four vocational education and training tracks – a professional diploma track, a general vocational education diploma track, a professional apprenticeship track and a vocational training courses track – have been introduced in vocational colleges. Vocational training for women is promoted through seven vocational colleges spread over several governorates. There is also the Vocational College of Marine Sciences in Khaburah governorate. Vocational training for women has seen an increase in women accepted to the aforementioned four tracks. They have added specializations suitable for women, such as beauty care, specialized sales, electronics, farming techniques, furniture upholstery, design, decoration, fish farming and fish quality control. Annex XXIV shows the numbers of male and female students studying in vocational colleges disaggregated by institution, sex and academic year.

### **Article 11: Employment**

96. We turn to paragraph 37 of the Committee’s concluding observations and the recommendations in paragraph 38 on promoting the equal sharing of family and domestic responsibilities between women and men and enhancing women’s access to the formal labour market. The Labour Code promulgated by Royal Decree No. 35/2003 explicitly states that its provisions must be applied on the basis of the principle of equality between male and female workers without discrimination where their work situations are comparable. Every citizen has the right to perform their chosen job within the constraints of the law. Forced labour may not be imposed on anyone except by law, for the performance of a public service and for a fair wage. Article 3 bis of the Act states explicitly that an employer shall be prohibited from imposing any form of compulsory or forced labour. To provide even more protection to women, article 84 of the Code provides that no employer may dismiss a woman worker for absence due to a certified illness attributable to pregnancy or childbirth or prevent her from returning to work, provided that the total period of absence is not more than six months.

97. In order to promote national legislation that encourages women’s participation in the labour market, the competent authorities in Oman are working on a national project to draft a new labour law. It was announced as part of the tenth five-year plan (2021–2025). Various stakeholders are involved in the drafting process.

98. In affirmation of the importance of the role of women in family life, the Labour Code sets special leave for women to cover the pre- and post-delivery period. A number of private-sector businesses have sought to amend labour regulations to grant women post-delivery leave of up to 112 days. That was the number of days set by Petroleum Development Oman in 2018.

99. In order to encourage joint parental leave, the General Federation of Oman Trade Unions has submitted draft legislation on paternity leave for male employees to the relevant authorities. The Federation’s member unions are being encouraged to push for paternity leave and more paid vacation days for women in their negotiations with employers. They are also being encouraged to push for infant childcare in the workplace. Several unions have signed collective agreements with employers in various economic sectors that provide all these benefits, which has improved conditions for working women.

100. To promote legal awareness for women and training for women workers, the Ministry of Social Development has sponsored 13 awareness-raising lectures on regulations and laws on pensions and post-retirement compensation for female employees. These have been held in cooperation with the Civil Service Employees Pension Fund and Omani women’s associations. As of 2019, some 970 women had benefitted. With a view to enhancing the capabilities of women working in private

sector establishments, the General Federation of Oman Trade Unions has provided training for women as part of its basic programme for union work. It consists of several modules, the most important of which concern labour legislation and negotiation skills, and has raised the capacities of women working in the private sector. The number of women members involved in trade union work has increased steadily and significantly, as can be seen from periodic and annual reports. Union women have gained membership in a number of local, regional and international councils and committees.

101. Job postings in the public and private sectors have been revised to eliminate discriminatory language. Since there are no legal provisions or Ministry decisions giving preference to one sex over another in filling vacant positions, there should be no discrimination in advertising those positions, although there are some jobs that because of their special nature require gender to be specified.

### **Women domestic workers**

102. We turn to the paragraph 39 of the concluding observations and the recommendations in paragraph 40 concerning the establishment of an enforcement mechanism to ensure that the same contracts are used in the State party and in workers' countries of origin. With Ministerial Decision No. 1/2011, the Sultanate issued regulations for recruiting non-Omani labour that establish the rights and duties of recruitment agencies. Recruitment agencies must identify the accredited foreign employment agencies they work with in the countries they recruit from. The Decision requires employers to sign labour contracts with workers that list the rights and obligations of both parties. A committee consisting of specialists from the relevant Government agencies has been formed. It meets periodically with embassies to identify the rights and duties of workers and come up with solutions that preserve those rights.

103. As part of measures being taken to ensure respect for workers' human rights, Ministerial Circular No. 2/2006 prohibits an employer from holding on to a worker's passport. In the event that a passport is confiscated by an employer, the worker may file a labour complaint or lawsuit. The Royal Oman Police has amended article 24 of the implementing regulations for the Aliens' Residency Act to allow a foreign national's residency permit to be transferred from one employer to another after appropriate checks without requiring a "no-objection" certificate from the previous employer. That will help to make the conditions of non-Omani workers more stable and allow them to move to more suitable work environments. These laws, regulations, provisions and decisions implemented have helped to protect working women from ill-treatment.

104. In order to continue raising the awareness of women domestic workers about their rights, the relevant agencies are making major efforts to make workers in general and domestic workers in particular aware of their rights and duties under the Labour Code and its implementing regulations. The Ministry of Labour, in cooperation with the airports authority, distributes legal pamphlets that list the rights and duties of workers. These publications have been translated into several languages to make them easier for non-Arabic speaking workers to understand.

105. Ministerial Decision No. 189/2004 concerning domestic workers also sets forth rules and special conditions of work. Those rules take into account the specific nature of this type of work and allow this category of workers to file complaints with the relevant agencies and courts. The relevant agency regulates the work of domestic workers and other workers in comparable situations. For example, it sets their hours, vacations and other entitlements under the Labour Code.

106. In order to ensure that women workers have effective access to remedies, the Labour Code protects the rights of women workers with employment contracts. The general provisions of the Labour Code explicitly criminalize forced labour, as we indicated above in our response to the recommendation in paragraph 38. It is penalized under articles 116 and 123 of the Code, and therefore punishable by law.

107. With regard to criminalizing forced labour, article 2 of the Combating Trafficking in Persons Act promulgated by Royal Decree No. 126/2008 defines the perpetrator of such an offence as anyone who, by means of coercion, threat, deception, abuse of position or influence or by taking advantage of a person's vulnerability or by using power over that person or by any other illegitimate means, whether direct or indirect, deliberately uses, transfers, houses or receives a person for the purpose of exploiting him or her. Exploitation can take many forms. Some are listed in article 1 of the aforementioned Act. These include exploitation for prostitution, sexual abuse, forced labour, servitude, any practices that resemble servitude or slavery, and organ removal. The Act also prohibits forced or compulsory labour. It should be noted that the Sultanate of Oman ratified the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) by Royal Decree No. 75/1996, and the ILO Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105) by Royal Decree No. 65/2005.

108. In implementation of the prohibition against confiscating workers' passports mentioned above in connection with the recommendation in paragraph 40, the Sultanate has designated a hotline that can be used by any woman worker to contact the authorities and file a report of any type of violation or abuse to which they might have been subjected. Electronic complaints can be filed on the Ministry of Labour website. Complaints must be looked into within a specified period of time. To ensure that a sufficient number of shelters are available for women domestic workers who are victims of abuse and exploitation, the Combating Trafficking in Persons Act provides for free medical care and legal and social assistance to be offered in a specially equipped shelter in line with the recommendation in paragraph 30. With regard to encouraging the establishment of a domestic workers' union: Women domestic workers have the right to join expatriate social and cultural clubs. The Civil Associations Act allows such clubs to be established.

## **Article 12: Health**

### **Reproductive health services**

109. We turn to paragraph 41 of the concluding observations and the recommendations in paragraph 42 concerning women and health. As noted earlier, the Basic Law of the State promulgated by Royal Decree No. 6/2021 affirms gender equality, including with respect to health rights, in article 15 in Chapter III on Social Principles. It states that the State shall ensure health care for citizens and shall endeavour to provide means of prevention and treatment for diseases and epidemics. In a previous report, we noted that a woman has the right to make use of any health services without approval from the guardian, whether a father or husband. She has the right to sign for surgical or other interventions for herself.

110. Royal Decree No. 75/2019 was issued promulgating the Act regulating the exercise of the medical profession and auxiliary medical professions. Article 31 of that Act provides for the right of women to health services. However, it requires the consent of both spouses for surgery that prevents reproduction. Article 26 requires free and informed consent for any treatment or medical service, which means that forced evaluations and forced abortions are prohibited.

111. To ensure provision of comprehensive health services – including sexual and reproductive health services – the tenth five-year plan for health development in the

Sultanate of Oman was issued. It is the first implementation plan in the health component of Oman Vision 2040, and is based on the Health Vision 2050 plan, global and regional agreements, and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. It consists of 44 outcomes that the health sector will seek to achieve over the years 2021–2025. Outcome 2 is: “To improve the health of girls and women of reproductive and post-reproductive age”. That will be done by providing continuous health coverage during pregnancy, childbirth and the post-delivery period, increasing the use of birth spacing for safe maternity, and offering more gynaecological services in health-care facilities. Outcome 6 was formulated with a view to increased screening for diseases such as breast cancer and cervical cancer, and more premarital medical examinations.

112. As noted in our previous report, in order to ensure continuity of prenatal, obstetric and postnatal care services, the Child Act provides in article 15, paragraph 5, that State agencies must take all necessary prevention and treatment measures for mothers before and after childbirth. The State must provide reproductive health services free of charge through trained doctors and midwives as part of a national programme to ensure quality health care for Omani mothers, non-Omani women married to Omanis, and women workers in the government sector. Non-Omani women working in the private sector must be covered by employer health insurance.

113. In order to provide comprehensive coverage across all governorates, health services have been integrated into primary health care to bring them closer to the population. It takes an average of 20 minutes to get to the nearest health clinic, based on a speed of 80 km/hour. There were total of 211 health centres as of the end of 2020. There were also 21 health complexes, all of which provide reproductive health services. Some health centres in remote villages have been equipped with maternity beds. In 2020, for every 500,000 inhabitants, there were 11.5 facilities providing basic obstetric care. Secondary care services are provided by referral hospitals in the governorates. Cases requiring subspecialties are referred for tertiary care in Muscat governorate. The State covers the cost of transporting these cases from remote governorates. Annex XXV shows the ratio of health workers (or the equivalent) in rural villages to population (disaggregated by health worker profession and sex) in 2020.

114. Following the results of the national nutrition survey conducted in 2017, which focused on women of reproductive age and pregnant women in particular, the “Barriers” study was conducted in 2019. It was the first time this sort of study had been done in the Sultanate of Oman. It was aimed at identifying barriers and obstacles that prevent people from engaging certain kinds of behaviour. The study tried to identify the causes of three health problems that had been identified in the national nutrition survey: low rates of exclusive natural breastfeeding among mothers with children aged 4 to 9 months; low numbers of meals given to infants by mothers with children aged 9 to 23 months; and high rates of anaemia in pregnant women.

115. To improve the quality of women’s prenatal and postnatal services provided in all governorates, a remote training programme was designed for health workers. In 2017, in cooperation with the International Society of Ultrasound in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, a national training programme was implemented to train women doctors at primary health-care facilities to perform ultrasound scans to provide pregnant women access to that service in facilities nearby. In 2018, in cooperation with the Society of Critical Care Medicine, training courses were held for women gynaecologists and obstetricians and male and female anaesthesiologists in all governorates, with a view to enhancing the skills of health workers to deal with emergencies during pregnancy and childbirth (Fundamental Critical Care Support: Obstetrics).

116. In order to identify acute pregnancy complications and life-threatening situations during pregnancy, childbirth and the post-delivery period, and to identify

risk factors, a national study was conducted from October 2016 to September 2018. During the study, members of the national maternal mortality committee and similar committees in all the governorates, along with a number of women doctors, underwent training and skill-enhancement in how to review maternal morbidity and mortality to identify high-risk life-threatening maternal medical conditions, medical interventions, and lessons learned, with a view to avoiding such situations in the future and developing therapeutic protocols to reduce maternal morbidity and mortality.

117. The Sultanate's efforts have been reflected in continued high rates of maternal care coverage, which is over 99 per cent. In 2020, medically supervised deliveries were at 99.9 per cent. The results show in the marked decline in maternal and child morbidity and mortality. The infant mortality rate has decreased from 103 per 1,000 live births in 1975 to 7.6 per 1,000 live births in 2020. The mortality rate for children under 5 has decreased from 149 per 1,000 live births in 1975 to 9.3 per 1,000 live births in 2020. The maternal mortality rate decreased from 22 per 100,000 live births in 1995 to 14.1 per 100,000 live births in 2019. As part of the national fertility programme, health facilities are trying to assess cases and identify causes of infertility, and provide medical or surgical treatment needed by couples. Assistive reproductive techniques such as intrauterine fertilization are available free of charge at Ministry of Health facilities. Annex XXVI shows the numbers of persons visiting infertility clinics by governorate and sex for the years 2018–2019.

118. Health services related to sexual health and sexually transmitted diseases have been integrated into primary health-care facilities. Secondary care is provided in referral hospitals and private sector hospitals. Client data are treated with complete confidentiality regardless of marital status. A manual of primary health care for sexually transmitted diseases has been created. A national strategy for sexually transmitted diseases has been set forth and adopted that includes enhanced prevention and treatment services. HIV testing is available for women after consultation in primary health care clinic. Voluntary consultations are available in most governorates. Infected women are informed and immediately referred for antiretroviral treatment through a trained team. Training has been provided to number of health workers. In 2019, a primary health-care manual was issued on diagnosing patients living with the disease and referring them for secondary care. There is also a follow-up system for women or men suffering from HIV/AIDS who miss an antiretroviral therapy clinic appointment. In terms of the targets set by the World Health Organization (WHO) and international organizations for curbing HIV/AIDS, namely, the "90–90–90" targets for diagnosis, treatment and viral load suppression, we have seen improvement. As of December 2019, those indicators were 69–87–90, compared with 57–53–75 for 2015. Data show that indicators for diagnosis, treatment and viral load suppression have seen a greater improvement in females than in males. For males, the numbers were 57–50–74 in 2015, compared with 69–87–90 in 2019. For females, they were 57–61–79 in 2015, Compared with 70–89–92 in 2019. Annex XXVII shows the numbers of people suffering from HIV/AIDS in Oman who received treatment during the years 2018–2020.

119. HIV/AIDS screening began to be offered for pregnant women in 2009, on the first visit to a maternity clinic in a primary health-care clinic following consultation. The programme aims to detect cases among pregnant women so they can be provided with counselling, treatment and follow-up to reduce the chances of transmission of the disease to the fetus. Treatment is provided to the mother living with the disease, along with follow-up during pregnancy, childbirth and the post-delivery period. Infants born to mothers living with HIV/AIDS are tested upon birth. That is followed up by periodic testing until the baby is confirmed to be free of infection.

120. The proportion of pregnant women who received HIV testing increased from 93 per cent in 2015 to 97.4 per cent in 2019. No cases of mother-to-child transmission

were recorded in 2020. The Sultanate is currently seeking international recognition from WHO as a country that has eliminated mother-to-fetus transmission of HIV and syphilis. In 2020 a national committee was formed to verify that the Sultanate of Oman has met all the standards set by WHO and international organizations. That committee has conducted reviews of prevention and treatment programmes and services and the quality of laboratories and data, as well as the extent to which human rights standards have been applied. The Sultanate has submitted a report the WHO Regional Committee.

121. With regard to early detection of cancers related to reproductive and sexual health, the integrated service for early detection of breast cancer has been expanded. It targets women between 40 and 69, and also women under 40 who have risk factors for breast cancer. The service now covers seven governorates, and will be introduced in the remaining governorates as part of the tenth five-year plan. In order to promote community awareness of the importance of early detection of breast cancer and more widespread use of clinics, an expanded national awareness campaign was implemented in cooperation with the Oman Cancer Association and the private sector in 2018. Several events were held. Women in the target age group were screened at health facilities using the Cancer Association's mobile mammogram unit. Some 3,009 women underwent breast examinations during the campaign.

122. The tenth five-year plan for health development (2021–2025) includes a number of interventions for treatment and early detection of cervical cancer. A national study was done to measure the prevalence of the papillomavirus (HPV), which is the main cause of cervical cancer. The study will help planning for early detection services for cervical cancer and introduction of the HPV vaccine. Cervical cancer screening is currently done by swab in referral hospitals for women whose conditions so require. The State covers therapeutic services for cases where it is detected. Some procedures for pre-cancerous or stage-1 cases are performed in referral hospitals in the governorates. Other cases are referred for tertiary care to hospitals in Muscat governorate. There are two national cancer treatment centres that provide radiotherapy and chemotherapy services. The costs of treatment are borne by the State.

123. With regard to amending the Penal Code to legalize abortion, we note that article 36 of the Act regulating the exercise of the medical profession and auxiliary medical professions provides that an abortion may be performed where continuation of the pregnancy would pose a threat to the life of the mother or cause her severe medical hardship beyond what she can bear, or where the fetus is shown to be seriously and irreversibly deformed based on the report of a medical committee. In order to provide more opportunities for women to access safe abortion and post-abortion care services, health services are made available near residential communities. Women may get health counselling and receive suitable post-abortion care regardless of whether the abortion was legal or not. Services include the use of contraceptives in emergency cases where the pregnancy is not wanted. The rate of abortions registered with the Ministry of Health decreased from 9.7 per 1,000 women aged 15–49 in 2017 to 7.3 per 1,000 women aged 15–49 in 2020.

124. In order to ensure the availability of modern forms of contraception and reproductive health services to all women and adolescent girls, family planning services and modern contraceptives are provided free of charge in all primary health-care facilities. Contraceptives include dual and single hormone pills, shots, and male protection, as well as long-term methods such as IUDs and implants. The availability of contraceptives is monitored at the central and provincial levels. No shortages have been recorded by any health facility. Contraceptives are also available in the private health-care sector, some without a prescription. To ensure continued availability of these services, trainers are being trained at the governorate level to provide training for health workers based on each governorate's need. In 2019, the number of women

who spaced their births by more than two years was 77.3 per cent. Annex XXVIII shows the breakdown by age and governorate of Omani women visiting birth spacing clinics during the 2018–2019 period.

125. Despite the difficulties facing health services around the world and in Oman at the moment because of the COVID-19 pandemic, family planning services (birth spacing) have not been suspended. There have been no shortages of any contraceptives. There are 15.072 family-planning counsellors per 10,000 persons. The relevant parties have made efforts to implement the annual birth-spacing campaign for 2020, which took on a different character and kept pace with the reliance on modern technology that has become prominent in various areas of life around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic. All governorates took part in the campaign while observing preventive measures. Activities included virtual seminars on family planning targeting all segments of society, and various types of media and videos on birth spacing on social media platforms.

126. To ensure that adolescent girls receive care, coverage of adolescent girls through the school health programme has been expanded to cover girl secondary-school students and university students by adding university health. The current five-year plan aims to make services offered in primary health care institutions more adolescent-friendly. A manual of procedure was completed in 2019. Guidelines for counselling for adolescents have been drafted. Free premarital medical exam services have also been expanded. The number of primary health care facilities offering them increased from 71 in 2014 to 115 as of the end of 2019. Statistics showed that they were made use of by 14.8 per cent of persons getting married in 2019, compared to 6.9 per cent for 2017.

127. There are at present no studies available assessing the financial burden on the health-care system of providing medical treatment for victims of harmful practices, owing to the rarity of such cases. We note that there are specialized clinics that providing services for the treatment of psychological and mental illness in all governorates. Annex XXIX shows the numbers of mental health patients and total visits to clinics for mental illness in Ministry of Health facilities during the 2018–2020 period.

### **Article 13: Economic and social benefits**

128. We turn to paragraph 43 of the Committee’s concluding observations and the recommendations contained in paragraph 44 on ensuring effective implementation of Royal Decree No. 29/2013 by earmarking additional financial resources to increase women’s access to loans and other forms of financial credit. The loan system currently in force at the Oman Development Bank was adopted by Royal Decree No. 18/1997, amended by Royal Decree No. 18/2006. It does not discriminate between men and women in access to loans. Women have the same right as men to submit loan applications where conditions are met. The Bank disaggregates loan data by sex. Loans are made to companies that include women. That includes small, medium, micro- and seasonal loans. The percentage of women was 25 per cent. As of the end of December 2020, there were 298 women registered on the Riyadhah (entrepreneurship) database for the agricultural and rural sector. Riyadhah is a national programme to support male and female youths wishing to set up income-generating enterprises.

129. To augment efforts by the relevant parties to empower women economically by encouraging them to become entrepreneurs, Royal Decree No. 107/2020 established the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority. It has a legal personality and enjoys financial and administrative independence. Its main competences include

providing financial, technical, administrative and legal consultations to small and medium enterprises, and financing men and women entrepreneurs, small and medium business owners, and artisans to help them establish their enterprises and expand their activities. It has established a mechanism for coordinating with the Central Bank of Oman to ensure an increase in credit facilities for small and medium enterprises. Annex XXX shows the number of businesses registered to women by governorate, urban area and village for the years 2020–2021.

130. A package of social protection initiatives has been adopted to enhance the activity and sustainability of small and medium enterprises and to promote youth projects – especially in the light of the current conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The package includes the launch of the emergency financing programme with a financing ceiling of up to 10,000 Omani rials and a repayment period of up to 48 months, with a six-month grace period and no administrative or technical fees.

131. The Ministry of Social Development has taken measures to protect and empower families on social security and those with limited incomes. Ministerial Circular No. 2/2018 provides for social security pensions to continue to be disbursed to entitled beneficiaries until an enterprise becomes a proven success and starts to generate an income equivalent to the pension the family is entitled to, or for a period not to exceed three years from the start of the enterprise, whichever is sooner, provided there are no special obstacles to the enterprise’s success. The Ministry also coordinates and partners with relevant parties. It has signed cooperation agreements with the Ministry of Labour, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, Sohar University, the Oman Education and Training Investment Company and the Zubair Small Enterprises Centre.

132. At the national level, a number of programmes have been implemented in partnership with international organizations. They include the following: cooperation with the World Bank to implement a social safety net project that includes a pilot project to create a labour market for social security recipients; a partnership programme for economic empowerment of families on social security and those with limited incomes, in cooperation with the Arab Gulf Programme for Development; and a joint programme between Omani women’s associations and the Ministry of Social Development to build a system capable of providing services related to the economic empowerment of families on social security in an effective and efficient way that ensures self-sustainability of enterprises. The project is divided into two phases: phase I covering 2021–2022 and phase II covering 2023–2025.

133. With a view to increasing the contribution of Omani women to the national economy and allowing them access to financing to establish and develop small and medium enterprises, the (former) Rafd Fund adopted a financing strategy based on giving equal shares of financing to women and men, with eased conditions and controls and branches in all governorates to facilitate access to and benefit from the services provided. In 2017, a special financing programme called the Rural Women’s Programme was inaugurated; it finances rural women’s projects such as beekeeping for honey production, poultry farming and pickle making. Women may also benefit from other financing programmes offered by the Fund. Some programmes, such as the industrial programme, have loan ceilings of up to 200,000 Omani rials. As part of efforts to build the administrative, financial and technical entrepreneurial capacities of women and men alike, the Fund has worked in cooperation with relevant parties to continue to provide assistance to men and women beneficiaries after they obtain funding, providing services related to consulting, training, marketing, media services, business contracts and procurement. As of the end of June 2018, some 1,177 women had benefited from access to employment opportunities and accounted for 35 per cent of the total projects supported.

134. To ensure the participation of women's organizations in the planning and implementation of national strategies aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, rural women farmers, ranchers, manufacturers and producers, along with some of the heads and members of Omani women's associations, took part in workshops to draft a "national strategy for rural and agricultural development 2040" and a "rural women's strategy". They also took part in devising projects to raise the capacities of rural women using the participatory rural appraisal method adopted by the United Nations Food and Agriculture and Organization (FAO).

135. The Sultanate of Oman has worked to provide opportunities for recreational activities, sports and other aspects of cultural life for the entire population, including women. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth has mandated that sport federations set aside seats for women for the 2020–2024 period. That would increase opportunities to expand women's sports. A Women's Club for Sports and Cultural Creativity was just announced in October 2021. Seven women's committees were announced in sports clubs. Some 20 clubs have taken part in programmes of the department of women's sports. Omani women have performed well in a variety of sports competitions, locally and internationally.

136. In line with the "Humans and society" component of Oman Vision 2040 on providing a suitable environment for the development of women in special situations, a programme on empowering women inmates was developed in cooperation between the Ministry of Social Development and the Royal Oman Police in 2020. It aims to identify the needs of women inmates and develop their capacities through an integrated programme that provides them with rehabilitation opportunities to foster self-employment and productivity by establishing future projects and identifying marketing windows.

137. In cooperation with youth volunteer teams, Government agencies and have greatly improved the situation of women's culture. In strategic cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the "Creative Mornings" team launched the "Omani Women Wiki" initiative to enrich digital content about Omani women who are influential in the fields of culture, education, society, politics and innovation. It has raised their digital profile by documenting their biographies on Arabic Wikipedia.

#### **Article 14: Rural women**

138. We turn to the paragraph 45 of the concluding observations and the recommendations in paragraph 46 on the implementation of measures to accelerate the achievement of substantive equality for rural women in all areas. The Basic Law of the State guarantees the right of women to register land with a constitutional guarantee of equality with men before the law. Article 14 affirms that private property is inviolable. A person may only be prevented from disposing of their property within the limits of the law. A person may only have their property taken away if it is in the public interest, and only under conditions set by law. Inheritance is a guaranteed right governed by the Islamic sharia. In the previous report, we noted that there was an integrated component devoted to rural women in the National Agricultural Development Strategy for 2015-2040. The strategic direction of policy and investment in the agricultural and rural sectors comes with a comprehensive set of measures to include more women in diversifying sources of income and creating job opportunities.

139. In 2018, as part of mechanisms and administrative measures to promote rural development in the Sultanate of Oman, a Department of Rural Development was established at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. It is concerned

with partnership with and development of rural communities; the economic and social empowerment of individuals – including rural women and girls – in agricultural and rural communities; and the promotion of community cultural programmes.

140. As part of measures to create income-generating opportunities for rural women, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has cooperated with the Oman Development Bank to establish a financing programme to support rural women and girls' projects. It is called the Rifi programme and has a portfolio of some 12 million Omani rials, subject to increase. It allows rural women to launch agriculture and livestock enterprises while benefiting from an outstanding incentive package and facilitated access to soft loans. The programme intersects with the agricultural development strategy's objective of value-added financing for small and emerging enterprises. It is also linked to such international strategic goals as Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals and provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, specifically articles 13 and 14.

141. The Sultanate's Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources also empowers women economically by providing full funding for rural women's projects through a grant system. A system is used of deducting small shares from the demonstration projects offered by the Ministry, less than 30 per cent of the total. The agricultural projects system also provides modern agricultural equipment, technology and other development programmes in accordance with implementing regulations that call for supporting agricultural programmes approved by this Ministry at 75 per cent for female beneficiaries from families on social security and 50 per cent for female beneficiaries from low-income families. In partnership with private sector corporate social responsibility departments and volunteer civic associations, the Agriculture and Fisheries Development Fund is also working to design and implement integrated packages of small and medium-sized income-generating productive enterprises for rural women at full funding. That is on top of the support already provided by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (formerly the Rafd Fund) in the form of soft loans noted above.

142. In furtherance of support and economic empowerment for rural women, some 40 marketing platforms for rural women's products have been launched in Muscat and some other governorates, in cooperation with the Tayseer platform, the Oman frankincense exhibit at Expo 2020 Dubai, the Omade platform, and five other electronic platforms. Women's products are being promoted, supported and developed, with 100 per cent of customs fees. They are being developed and quality is ensured in accordance with safety standards before they are put on the market. Focus has been on electronic guidance in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Rural women's projects have also been linked and networked with certain private, public, civic and volunteer enterprises, including some that supply aromatic and food products to hotels and tourist resorts. At the same time, there has been cooperation with international organizations, including the World Food Programme, to develop such food products as dates, honey, fish and shellfish in the short term.

143. In 2017, as part of the attention it is paying to the situation of women, especially rural women, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, in cooperation with FAO conducted an analytical study on rural women's land ownership rights and progress made on Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals by formulating and promoting national policies in support of rural women.

#### **Gender and climate change**

144. We turn to paragraph 47 of the Committee's concluding observations and the recommendations contained in paragraph 48 on how a gender perspective was applied in the identification of adaptation and mitigation measures. With Royal Decree No. 28/2019, Oman ratified the Paris Agreement, which aims to use a variety of

means to strengthen the global response to the threat posed by climate change in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication efforts. That Agreement has been implemented in a manner that embodies equity and the principle of shared responsibilities, taking into account human rights obligations, gender equality, women's empowerment and intergenerational equality.

145. Participation of Omani women in the development of climate change action plans has been encouraged. Women have taken an active part in drafting the national strategy for climate change adaptation and mitigation, including supervising collection of data and information on greenhouse gas emissions by the relevant development sectors in the Sultanate. Six Omani women master's degree students from various faculties of Sultan Qaboos University have helped to collect and analyse data as assistant researchers.

146. The Sultanate of Oman has also made sure to include women in leadership and supervisory positions, and as members of international committees, including the World Commission on Protected Areas, the Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas and the technical team on turtles. They have also taken on senior management positions at nature reserves in the governorates. Omani women have taken part in working sessions, discussions, the drafting of reports and national strategic outcomes, and training sessions on climate changes (70 per cent). Omani women's associations play major roles in the volunteer response to climate events that have plagued several of the governorates, the most recent being Cyclone Shaheen in 2021. They have also taken part in assessing the resulting impacts by conducting studies on environmental effects, directing the work of specialists within the national anti-oil-pollution and anti-waste mechanisms, and appointing a specialized team to conduct comprehensive awareness campaigns for women in the communities.

147. With regard to best practices in measures to adapt to climate change and mitigate its effects from a gender perspective, the Sultanate provides protection to rural women, and in particular those suffering from harsh climatic conditions such as increased summer temperatures. Efforts focus on productivity, time and climate adaptation through the adoption of modern assistive technology that minimizes time and effort and through support for production lines, industry and marketing. There are some 632 programmes for the introduction of modern technology. Some 50 beneficiary families are enrolled in a programme to use hydroponic systems for leafy crops. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources collaborates with the Oman Meteorology to utilize modern techniques of disseminating knowledge and guidance on climate change through media, social media and the personal phones of rural women.

### **Women with disabilities**

148. We turn to paragraph 49 of the Committee's concluding observations and the recommendations contained in paragraph 50 on identifying measures to enhance access of women with disabilities in various areas, including inclusive education. The Sultanate has developed a range of rehabilitation services from an early age for persons with disabilities, including girls, to enable them to integrate into schools. As of the end of 2021, there were some 79 rehabilitation centres: 31 government centres, 11 civil society centres and 37 private centres.

149. In order to ensure that girls with disabilities receive educations, the Ministry of Education – in its capacity as the agency responsible for providing quality education services to all persons with mental, auditory or visual disabilities, including women – makes sure to provide special education schools that allow enrolment for both females and males. Statistical data show that for the academic year 2020/21, females accounted for approximately 42 per cent of total enrolment in special education

schools. The Ministry of Education has also adopted a programme to integrate persons with disabilities in public schools, to give such persons the opportunity to enrol in formal education. During the academic year 2020/21, some 1,643 male and female students enrolled in the integration programme. Females accounted for approximately 44 percent.

150. In order to ensure the access of women with disabilities to institutions of higher education, 50 seats have been set aside annually for domestic scholarships for students with disabilities of both sexes in private higher education institutions. There are also missions sent to study abroad. Sultan Qaboos University provides a package of services for students with disabilities that includes an assistance department under the Dean of Student Affairs and a special laboratory for persons with disabilities at the College of Arts. There is also an affordable housing unit for students of this category, a laboratory in the Language Centre, a special digital library and a bookstore. An introductory guide has been prepared for Sultan Qaboos University employees and students with disabilities.

151. In order to build the capacities of women with disabilities, a number of vocational training programmes have been implemented in cooperation with private sector companies for female students with disabilities. They also receive education in entrepreneurship and how to launch their own student companies in areas commensurate with their abilities. Support is provided for participation in educational activities and approved competitions. The Sultanate also supports on-the-job training for persons over 18 that targets men and women with disabilities at the Wafa' centres, as a first step towards on-the-job training in a workplace.

152. Measures are being taken to increase quotas for persons with disabilities at public and private companies. Legislation in the Sultanate of Oman guarantees care for persons with disabilities, including article 15 in the Chapter on Social Principles of the Basic Law of the State. Article 9 of the act on care and rehabilitation for persons with disabilities provides that Government agencies and employers employing fifty or more workers shall be required to hire qualified disabled persons listed on the national manpower register and nominated by the Ministry of Labour for jobs and professions that need to be filled. A joint committee of the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Labour is developing an action plan for training and employing persons with disabilities in Government centres and companies and private training institutions funded by private sector institutions and facilities. The obstacles and challenges facing this group in the workplace are being studied.

153. With regard to access of women with disabilities to health care, the Ministry of Health issued Ministerial Decision No. 67/2015 creating a section for disability programmes in the Department of Non-Communicable Diseases to develop policies for treating persons with disabilities. It designs, implements and follows up plans and services for providing health care for persons with disabilities in the various governorates. The 2017–2022 five-year plan for persons with disabilities was developed in conjunction with the World Health Organization (WHO). The plan is based on ensuring fair and non-discriminatory access to primary health care for women and girls with disabilities at health care facilities for all specialties, including physiotherapy, occupational therapy, prosthetics, speech and language therapy, foot therapy, psychological rehabilitation, social and medical services, and rehabilitation nursing. It aims to make available qualified medical and nursing staff, in addition to physiotherapists and prosthetics specialist. With a view to disseminating health and disability prevention awareness at health facilities, many approved preventive awareness programmes aimed at males and females are provided on an ongoing basis. They include the “Examine and reassure yourself” and “Premarital examination” programmes for persons getting married. These subjects are also covered in the

awareness-raising materials of the Tamasuk national programme for newlyweds and couples mentioned above.

154. Social services to improve the situations of persons with disabilities are provided by the Ministry of Social Development. It disburses social security pensions and provides persons with disabilities with identity cards that confer a number of benefits and facilities. These include special parking and exemption from registration fees at health centres and hospitals. Civil society organizations that address disability and private sector companies assist the Ministry with social and financial support to enhanced access for the disabled to special housing. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning provides housing for disabled persons, excuses them from waiting in line to submit applications to acquire plots or build houses for their families, and provides them with affordable housing loans.

155. With regard to capacity-building programmes for State officials on the rights and special needs of women and girls with disabilities, capacity-building is provided for workers on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, dealing with and communicating with persons with disabilities and their families, and best humanitarian, human-rights and educational practices. Research, assessments and applied studies are conducted, and a plan has been developed to provide sign-language training to medical personnel and auxiliary staff in primary health care institutions. To facilitate the provision of health services, an electronic link was recently established in cooperation between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Development to record data on medical examinations, disability diagnosis, type and degree of disability, and treating physician.

156. With a view to focusing on the needs of women with disabilities and elderly women, awareness has been raised about the most important services for these groups in all sectors (government, private and civil society organizations). In 2020, in cooperation with the UNFPA office for the GCC States, the Ministry of Social Development held a virtual meeting (remotely) on social empowerment of elderly women and women with disabilities. The meeting covered legislative provisions, conventions and treaties on persons with disabilities and women. It also covered the national roles of the relevant agencies in ensuring care for elderly and disabled women in various areas.

## **VI. Follow-up of the implementation of the Convention, Part II, articles 15–16**

### **Article 15: Equality before the law and in civil matters**

157. We turn to paragraph 51 of the Committee’s concluding observations and the recommendations contained in paragraph 52 on ensuring the effective implementation of Royal Decree No. 11/2010 to guarantee that women are entitled to obtain a passport without seeking their guardian’s consent. All laws – including the aforementioned Royal Decree amending the Passport Act to grant women the right to obtain a passport without permission from a male guardian – are laws that have been enacted and entered into force. Any practices that violate them would render the perpetrator subject to criminal liability. We note that the procedure for a woman to obtain a passport has been put into practice. No practices have been monitored that would prevent women from exercising their legally prescribed right. If such practices were to occur, a woman would be able to have recourse to the Omani police or the judicial authorities to exercise her legally prescribed right to obtain a passport. Both men and women have the right to obtain an identity card. That is fact obligatory for both men and women.

158. As for the Penal Code, it does not contain any discriminatory provisions that would affect a woman's right to equality before the law in civil cases. In fact, the Penal Code contains provisions that guarantee women's the same financial rights and non-prejudice to their financial entitlement liability as men. The Penal Code contains no provisions that discriminate between women and men in civil transactions or cases.

159. With regard to ensuring that legal provisions on the *diyah* and *arush* do not discriminate against women, we note that that legislation addresses only a small aspect of compensation for murder or injury. In any case, such compensation goes to the heirs and not the deceased woman. The rule that *diyah* for a woman is half that for a man's does not apply in cases of compensation assessed by life insurance companies. Nor does it include cases of death and injury in the course of engaging in business. Legislation in force in the Sultanate of Oman awards equal compensation for men and women in cases of work-related death or injury. In such cases, there is no discrimination. With regard to *arush* – that is, compensation for the woman herself for her injuries – there has been no difference between a woman and a man in recent court rulings. *Arush* is meant to be compensation for damages. The damage caused by an injury to a woman might be greater than the damage caused by the same injury to a man, in which case the compensation for her might be greater than that awarded to a man for the same injury.

### **Article 16. Equality in matters relating to marriage and family relations**

160. We turn to paragraph 53 of the Committee's concluding observations and the recommendations contained in paragraph 54 on equal rights between men and women with regard to marriage and divorce and ending the practice of dowry. The Personal Status Code promulgated by Royal Decree No. 32/97 regulates the elements of the marriage contract. Marriage may only be concluded only with the consent of the woman. A woman's consent to a marriage contract is therefore one of the pillars of the marriage contract without which marriage cannot be concluded. The same is true of the right of women to annul a marriage contract. The law allows a woman concluding a marriage contract to stipulate she has the right to file for divorce and annul the marriage contract unilaterally. Women also have the right of recourse to the courts to annul a marriage contract when there are legal and factual considerations that support the woman's right to dissolve the marriage contract.

161. With regard to *sidaq* (dowry), the Personal Status Code provides that it belongs to the woman, who may dispose of it as she sees fit. No contrary condition may be considered. She has the right to dispose of it by any legal means of disposal. These dowry provisions do not constitute any violation or abuse of any women's rights.

162. Omani laws guarantee that the right to polygamy is not abused by husbands. A woman has the right to request a divorce in the event of harm caused by an action committed by the husband. She has the right to dissolve the marriage contract if there is a clause in the marriage contract allowing her to do so. We note that there are many provisions in the Personal Status Act that protect women from the phenomenon of polygamy and provide them with legal protection in that connection.

163. With regard to property acquired during marriage, the Personal Status Code along with the Civil Transactions Act guarantees both men and women equal capacity to conclude legal transactions without discrimination. The law also guarantees financial autonomy to the wife, whether before or after marriage. Assets acquired by the wife during marriage revert to her entitlement. The husband has no right to them as long as the marriage contract did not unite the husband's and wife's assets. Both spouses have the right to retain their separate financial assets. That continues until the marriage is

dissolved. So, all assets acquired by the wife revert to her. The husband cannot gain access to those assets or infringe on them. In addition, women have the right to funds that are found to have been acquired jointly by them and their husbands. Legislation in force in the Sultanate affirms that the husband can exert no leverage on the financial assets of his wife. Under no circumstances may he infringe on her private property. The Basic Law of the State provides that private property is sacrosanct and inviolable.

164. With regard to personal status cases, the Code of Civil and Commercial Procedure provides numerous guarantees for women to exercise their right to litigation. They can bring proceedings before courts of first instance. They have the right to appeal before the Supreme Court. Appeals deadlines in legal cases are short so as to expedite decisions on disputes and allow them to exercise their rights. Many cases involving women are expedited. Rulings on alimony, custody and other matters take priority over other cases. Custody is regulated by the Personal Status Code, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Child Act, since custody is a right of the child concerned. The woman has preference when the custodial parent is being determined. The basic principle of the Personal Status Code is that custody is the right of the women when a marriage is terminated.

165. With regard to offering a civil alternative to the Personal Status Code, the Sultanate is constantly reviewing its legislation, including the Personal Status Code, to ensure that it is in line with the Basic Law of the State and the international conventions to which the Sultanate of Oman is a party. Those conventions – with the exception of provisions with respect to which reservations have been lodged – are an integral part of the law of the land and are binding on all State agencies. Articles 15 and 21 provide for equality of rights as discussed above. There are no discriminatory provisions that would marginalize women legally, economically or socially with respect to independent financial assets. Women have a legal personality equal to that of men and the capacity to engage in any activity. They may conduct any legal transaction a man might conduct.

166. In order to enhance awareness among men and women of how to build marriages, the Sultanate's Ministry of Social Development and its partners have launched the "Tamasuk" national programme for newlyweds and couples. That programme tries to provide young people of both sexes, male and female, with the knowledge and skills needed to build a strong marital relationship. It covers all the legal, legal, health, social and economic requirements mentioned in connection with the recommendation in paragraph 22.

## **VII. Conclusion**

167. Much progress has been made on empowering women. Government agencies, private companies and civil society institutions are joining forces to maintain the progress achieved by Omani women in various fields. They are implementing all possible measures and policies to develop and improve women's capacities, so that they can assume the highest leadership positions and participate effectively in decision- and policymaking. The Sultanate of Oman affirms its commitment to international and regional instruments aimed at promoting and fulfilling women's rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.