



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

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



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List of abbreviations

ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
AFHS	Adolescent Friendly Health Services
APA	Annual Performance Agreement
BBS	Bhutan Broadcasting Service
BCCI	Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industries
BCB	Bar Council of Bhutan
BHU	Basic Health Unit
BNEW	Bhutan Network for Empowering Women
BNF	Bhutan Nuns Foundation
BNLI	Bhutan National Legal Institute
BWPC	Bhutan Women Parliamentary Caucus
CAM	Court Annexed Mediation
CBSS	Community Based Support System
CCs	Community Centres
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CCPA	Child Care and Protection Act 2011
CCPC	Civil and Criminal Procedure Code of Bhutan
CARLEP	Commercial Agriculture and Resilient Livelihood Enhancement Program
C4	Climate Change Coordination Committee
CICL	Children in Conflict with the Law
CLCs	Community Learning Centres
CSE	Comprehensive Sexual Education
CSI	Cottage and Small Industry
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DGRK	Druk Gyalpo Relief Kidu
DHI	Druk Holding and Investment
DLG	Department of Local Governance
DV	Domestic Violence
DVPA	Domestic Violence Prevention Act 2013 (DVPA)
ECB	Election Commission of Bhutan
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development

FLT	Functional Literacy Test
FYP	Five Year Plan
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GEMS	Gender Equality Monitoring System
GFP	Gender Focal Person
GEDCP	Gender, Environment, Disaster, Climate Change and Poverty
GCFP	Gender and Child Focal Person
GCF	Global Climate Fund
GNH	Gross National Happiness
GNHC	Gross National Happiness Commission
GNHI	Gross National Happiness Index
GRPB	Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting
HBW	Home-based Workers
JSW Law	Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law
JDWNRH	Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital
LDPM	Local Development Planning Manual
LGBT+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and Asexual
LG	Local Government
LGKRA	Local Government Key Result Area
LoIPR	List of Issues Prior to Reporting
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoLHR	Ministry of Labour and Human Resources
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MART	Mental Health and Psychosocial Response Team
MRG	Mainstreaming Reference Group
MSTF	Multi-sectoral Task Force
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NCGS	National Credit Guarantee Scheme
NCSID	National Cottage and Small Industry Development Bank
NCWC	National Commission for Women and Children
NFE	Non-Formal Education

NFIS	National Financial Inclusion Strategy
NGEP	National Gender Equality Policy
NKRA	National Key Results Area
NSB	National Statistical Bureau
NEC	National Environment Commission
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NPAGE	National Plan of Action for Gender Equality
PWD	Person with Disability
PCB	Penal Code of Bhutan
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
RBP	Royal Bhutan Police
RCJ	Royal Court of Justice
RCSC	Royal Civil Service Commission
RENEW	Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women
RIM	Royal Institute of Management
RNR	Renewable Natural Resource
RSSC	Royal Society for Senior Citizens
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAIEVAC	South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children
SAPA	Sectoral Adaptation Plan of Action
SABAH	South Asian Association of Home-based Workers
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SHG	Self Help Groups
TIP	Trafficking in Person
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WOOM	Women-Owned Open Market

Introduction

1. This report is a response to the List of Issues Prior to Reporting (LoIPR) by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) for Bhutan. The report highlights key achievements and efforts of Bhutan in achieving gender equality in all sectors and spheres. Relevant statistics are submitted as annexures to the report.

2. Since the last reporting in 2016, there have been several important developments. Bhutan successfully conducted its third parliamentary elections with the *Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa*¹ forming the third democratically elected government in 2018. The third local government election was also successfully conducted in 2021. Both elections saw an increase in women's representation from 8.3 percent in 2013 to 15.3 percent in 2018, and 11.6 percent in 2011 to 12.6 percent in 2021 respectively. In addition, a total of seven women *gups* were elected in 2021 as compared to two during the 2016 local government election.

3. The 12th FYP was launched in 2018, with an overarching objective to create a “just, harmonious and sustainable society through enhanced decentralization”. The Plan is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and represents Bhutan's commitment towards implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Additionally, “Gender Equality” is included as a dedicated National Key Results Area (NKRA) in the Plan towards achieving the SDG goal 5 and its international commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Methodology and Consultation Process

4. The preparation of the responses is led by the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) in consultation with various stakeholders including Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Private Sector, Media and Academia.

Legislative and institutional framework (Responses to para 2)

Harmonization of Laws

5. The National Law Review Taskforce² completed its review on the harmonization of inconsistencies in the national laws in 2018. Specific recommendations pertaining to women and children submitted to Parliament were mainly to amend sections 203 & 204 which were related to child molestation and grading of the offences. Accordingly, section 203 of the Penal Code of Bhutan was amended in 2021 to include acts that constitutes molestation.³ The offence was graded as a fourth-degree felony along with compensatory damages to be determined by the court.

6. Based on the recommendation, section 154 related to Trafficking in Person (TIP) was amended in line with the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons:

- A defendant shall be guilty of an offence of trafficking in persons if the defendant recruits, transports, transfers, harbours or receives a person by means

¹ The current government.

² A taskforce constituted in 2015 to review and provide recommendations to harmonize inconsistencies in laws in the country.

³ https://www.nab.gov.bt/assets/uploads/docs/acts/2021/Penal_Code_Amendment_Act_of_Bhutan_2021.pdf.

of the threat or use of force, or any other form of coercion, abduction, fraud or deception, the abuse of power, the abuse of the position of vulnerability, or the giving or receiving of payments or other benefit to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation. For the purpose of this Code, 'exploitation' includes, but not limited to, sexual exploitation, involuntary domestic servitude, forced labour, child labour and trafficking of human organs.

Capacity of the Bhutan National Legal Institute

7. The technical capacities of the Bhutan National Legal Institute (BNLI) officials were enhanced with two legal officers completing long term training on human rights and child justice. In addition, the BNLI officials received various in-country and ex-country capacity building on human rights, child justice, and women and child friendly judicial procedures. This contributed to their enhanced capacity to further build the capacities of the judiciary on the Domestic Violence Prevention Act 2013 (DVPA) and other related legislations and procedures, including women and child friendly procedures.

8. The Strategic Plan 2022-2026 provides strategic framework for the BNLI to cater to the changing needs of Judiciary, legal fraternity, youth, decision makers and general public. The Plan builds on key lessons from the implementation of the first Strategic Plan 2016-2020, and outlines priorities of the Institute for the next five years.

Gender Equality Law

9. The National Gender Equality Policy (NGEP)⁴ was approved by the Cabinet for implementation in 2020. The policy provides clear directives for gender equality and women's empowerment interventions. It is aimed at strengthening institutional mechanisms, coordination and collaboration, and ownership of gender equality interventions towards strengthening accountability. The NGEP is based on the premise that all individuals, families, communities and society will benefit from the ability of both women and men to develop their capabilities and realise their full potential without the limitations of gender stereotypes and discrimination. The Policy explores gender equality through the lens of three domains - political, social and economic. Simultaneously, a policy implementation plan outlining activities and initiatives towards achieving gender equality was approved to ensure effective implementation of the policy.

10. The National Plan of Action for Gender Equality (NAPGE) was developed for effective implementation of the Policy by the NCWC in 2020. The plan outlines interventions across 10 critical areas of good governance; health; ageing, mental health and disabilities; violence against women and girls; gender stereotypes and prejudices; economic development; education and training; poverty; sports and media; and environment and climate change. Depending on the implementation status of the NGEP and challenges, Bhutan will conduct a comprehensive needs assessment for the Gender Equality Act.

⁴ <https://www.ncwc.gov.bt/allpublications?key=policies>

Women's rights and gender equality in relation to the pandemic and recovery efforts (Responses to para 3)

Interventions to address gender issues during the COVID-19 pandemic

11. The government, led by the NCWC and supported by Development Partners (DP), developed and implemented the “Gender and Child Protection Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan” as an immediate measure to mitigate the increased vulnerabilities of women and children. It was also aimed to prevent and provide timely response to the survivors of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and violence against children. The plan covers all aspects of interventions across key areas: GBV; increased burden on women and girls; employment and livelihood; sexual and reproductive health; mental health and psycho-social support; access to justice; and other essential services and child protection. The Plan was developed through a consultative process and consists of multi-sectoral interventions to be implemented by all relevant government agencies and CSOs.

12. Effective prevention and response to GBV was identified as a critical area for action in the Plan and following interventions were carried out by the NCWC and its partners since April 2020:

(a) A Media Campaign titled #LoveBeginsAtHome was launched by the NCWC on both mainstream and social media. The campaign advocated for the importance of healthy and violence-free families, geared towards preventing GBV and violence against children during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, to disseminate accurate and uniform messages on GBV and services available, a team led by the government, consisting of CSOs and DPs, developed advocacy materials on GBV and its impact, risks of violence, and the importance of a healthy and peaceful family environment. The materials also included referral pathways and details of help desk and service providers, and the role of caregivers, community leaders and relevant agencies in preventing GBV;

(b) Awareness programs on GBV, reporting procedures, and available services for survivors were carried out by the Community Based Support System (CBSS) volunteers in 17 districts and two municipalities to about 3,000 community leaders and the general public in 2020;

(c) Basic procedures for responding to GBV were integrated in the curriculum of the *De-suung*⁵ Training Program. 3,000 *De-suups* (2,350 males and 650 females) were trained. 3,800 frontline workers, including health workers, law enforcement personnel, local government leaders, and members from CSOs such as the Taxi Association were also trained on responding to GBV;

(d) To provide timely and un-interrupted services to GBV survivors, online case management, counselling and emergency services were provided during the pandemic by the NCWC and other government and non-governmental partners. A guideline for responding to GBV in emergencies was developed in November 2020, taking into consideration the lessons learned from the first national lockdown in August 2020. 507 adult survivors, of which 475 were women and those at risk of experiencing violence, have benefitted from the services between 20 March 2020 and 30 April 2021;

(e) A crisis helpline with a first response team and emergency shelters in 20 districts were set up under the command of Her Majesty the *Gyaltsuen*⁶ during the

⁵ Guardians of peace.

⁶ Her Majesty the Queen of Bhutan.

second and third national lockdowns. Mobile counselling and case management services were also provided by the NCWC and RENEW.⁷

Measures to ensure equal participation and benefits from the COVID-19 stimulus interventions

13. Bhutan, through its non-discriminatory policies and in line with article 7 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, continues to guarantee women and girls equal participation in both political and public life, including during and post COVID-19 pandemic. A substantial number of women were trained and engaged as frontline workers delivering essential services during the pandemic. The *Kidu* program in the initial phases was operated by a team of 244 officials, of which 90 were female. Further, the COVID-19 prevention and mitigation initiatives were led by the only female minister, who serves as the health minister and vice chairperson of the NCWC.

14. A rapid socio-economic impact assessment of COVID-19 to assess the impact of the pandemic on individuals, households and businesses engaged in the tourism sector was carried out in 2020. It revealed a deep, widespread and cross-cutting impact on people engaged in the sector. The NCWC also undertook a nation-wide study to assess the impact of COVID-19 on women and children in 2021. The study revealed increased unpaid care and domestic responsibilities of women and girls and experiences of GBV, amongst others. It also provided evidence-based information for developing appropriate interventions like scaling up skills development programs and to better prepare for similar situations in the future.

15. The National Resilient Fund set up in April 2020 under His Majesty the King's command provided economic relief to people whose livelihoods were impacted by the COVID-19 through the *Druk Gyalpo's Relief Kidu*⁸ (DGRK). The *Kidu* provided monthly monetary support to vulnerable individuals, including women and single parents, among others. Support was also provided to children from lower socio-economic backgrounds to meet their basic needs and continue their education. 30,486 men and 27,475 women received the *kidu*, at least once between April 2020 and March 2022. Further, the relief fund also dispersed Nu. 130,736,900 as monthly child support to 16,073 children.⁹

16. To ascertain the number of vulnerable groups impacted by COVID-19, a mapping of vulnerable groups, including women engaged in the entertainment sector, survivors of GBV, and single mothers was carried out by the Ministry of Health (MoH) and partners in 2020. Thereafter, a help desk was established in all districts to support them to apply for *kidu* and other livelihood opportunities. A targeted livelihood program for women and girls affected by COVID-19 was also implemented in partnership with the CSOs. The program benefited 181 women and adolescent girls, including survivors of GBV and those in the entertainment sector (*Drayangs*¹⁰). These training opportunities were also extended to other vulnerable groups such as the LGBT+ community, women living with HIV/AIDs, and victims of Trafficking in Persons (TIP).

17. 188 Home-based Workers (HBWs) in seven *Dzongkhags*,¹¹ availed livelihood and skills building opportunities through the Skills Building and Economic Empowerment of HBWs Project, which was implemented in collaboration with the

⁷ CSO working for empowerment of women and children with specific focus on survivors of GBV and Sexual Violence.

⁸ His Majesty the King's Welfare Program.

⁹ Data from DGRK office.

¹⁰ Entertainment centres.

¹¹ Districts in Bhutan are called Dzongkhag.

South Asian Association of Home-based Workers (SABAH) Bhutan¹². The project aimed at enhancing the resilience of HBWs to the impact of the pandemic. They were trained on weaving, food processing, and tailoring.

18 The government launched the National Credit Guarantee Scheme (NCGS) in October 2020 to expand access to finance to start or expand businesses. The fund was launched to stimulate the economy, create jobs and enhance productivity through collateral free loans. A total loan of Nu. 704.21 million for 188 projects across 14 districts was disbursed since its establishment. 35 women-owned projects benefited from this support, of which 10 have begun commercial operation. Regular monitoring and support are provided by the officials of NCGS to ensure effective implementation of the support. Furthermore, 3140 women entrepreneurs availed loans with minimal interest rate from the National Cottage and Small Industry Development Bank (NCSID).

Sexual and reproductive health services for women and girls

19. Besides continued and un-interrupted Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) services through the hospitals, Basic Health Units (BHU) and outreach services, measures were also undertaken to ensure access to SRH services for women and girls in quarantine facilities, schools, and shelter homes. For instance, 5660 sanitary pads with menstrual hygiene management information and COVID-19 prevention messages were supplied to 66 quarantine facilities in 2020. Sanitary pads were also provided to 12151 girls in 450 schools across the country. Likewise, 3500 women and girls living in temporary shelters in the high-risk bordering towns were provided with the same services. Convenience kits with sanitary pads were also provided to front-line workers in the bordering areas.

20. To guide the health and other front-line workers on the provision of timely and appropriate services, particularly during the pandemic, an interim operational guideline for SRH and family planning services was developed. A dedicated hotline service through which pregnant women can access reproductive and maternal services, including ambulances for institutional delivery during lockdowns, was also instituted by the MoH.

21. To educate nuns on menstrual hygiene management and GBV, the Bhutan Nuns Foundation (BNF)¹³ conducted an awareness program reaching 1,500 nuns from 32 nunneries. 15,344 sanitary pads were distributed to all the nunneries to ensure uninterrupted access to menstrual hygiene.

22. Towards strengthening the efforts to prevent and respond to GBV and improving access to SRH services during the pandemic, Her Majesty Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck, who is the goodwill ambassador of United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), led an awareness program through the media. The program highlighted increased incidences of GBV during the pandemic, services available for GBV survivors and SRH, and the role of individuals, families and communities in preventing GBV. It also highlighted the importance of integrating GBV and SRH in the national COVID-19 prevention and response mechanisms.

¹² CSO responsible for promoting welfare of home-based workers in Bhutan.

¹³ BNF is a CSO working for the empowerment of nuns.

Access to justice and legal complaint mechanisms (Response to para 4)

Initiatives to improve access to justice for women and girls

23. Towards providing better and specialized judicial services to women and children, a separate Family and Child bench was established in the Thimphu District Court in 2016, with a separate courtroom to hear cases involving Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) and child victims of abuse. The Bench is presided over by a judge with expertise on women and children friendly judicial procedures and related legislations. The Royal Court of Justice (RCJ) has also established woman and child friendly courtrooms in places without dedicated benches/courts to enhance access to judicial services.

24. A pilot eLitigation platform was initiated in courts covering 26 benches across the country. The platform allows electronic registration of cases, filing of documents, payments, and remote hearings, among others. It is expected to ease access to justice services for rural communities and disadvantaged populations, particularly women and children. Capacity building was also carried out for court users and litigants, Community Centres (CCs) and local governments in the pilot *Dzongkhags*. 308 people availed these services, and the RCJ conducted 13.5 percent of the total court hearings virtually in 2021. Based on the evidence, the RCJ plans to scale up the platform to all courts across the country.

25. A minimum procedure on eLitigation for women and children was developed by the NCWC in partnership with government and CSO partners. The procedure outlines the procedures, guiding principles and roles of different service providers in supporting women and children's access to eLitigation services.

26. To support GBV survivors' access to justice services and effectively respond to their needs, a Consensus Building Program was initiated by RENEW with NCWC, RBP and Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law (JSW Law) in 2017. The program offers alternatives for GBV survivors and women in difficult circumstances to avail services from trained CBSS volunteers.

27. Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) continues to be an important avenue for access to justice and legal remedies for cases which are petty and civil in nature. ADR services are provided free of cost by the trained elected local leaders (excluding the *gup*¹⁴), who were also oriented on women and children related legislations and procedures. Further, an annual assessment is conducted to assess the impact of ADR.

28. The Court Annexed Mediation (CAM) was instituted in 2019, providing litigants the opportunity to opt for negotiated settlement with assistance of in-house judicial mediators any time during the litigation process. Furthermore, efforts are underway to increase access to notary services by bringing it within the closer reach of people across the country.

29. A justice sector data integration project is currently under implementation. The project is expected to strengthen the collection, management and sharing of information between the agencies, which will result in better tracking and measurement of results, particularly with regard to vulnerable groups. The project is expected to be completed by June 2023.

¹⁴ Gup- Elected Head of Block Administration.

Legal aid for women and children

30. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan guarantees protection of human rights for all Bhutanese, and provides effective remedies when those rights are violated. Article 9 calls for the creation of a civil society; provision of justice through fair, transparent and an expeditious process; and provision of legal aid to secure justice. The Civil and Criminal Procedure Code of Bhutan (CCPC), 2001 states that “an indigent accused shall have legal aid provided for one’s defence when the interest of justice so requires”, and the *Jabmi*¹⁵ (Amendment) Act of Bhutan 2016 mandates the Bar Council (*Jabmi Tshogdey*¹⁶) to “provide pro bono legal aid to an indigent person in addition to funding support from the state”.

31. The Bar Council of Bhutan was established in 2017 to facilitate access to *jabmi* services and to ensure just, fair and prompt dispensation of justice. The Council is also responsible to provide *pro bono* legal aid to indigent people. Subsequently, to guide the Council to discharge its functions effectively, a Strategic Plan for the Bar Council of Bhutan (BCB) 2019-2023 was developed and is currently under implementation. The Plan is expected to enable the Bar Council to take appropriate actions to provide legal services to those in need, including *pro bono* services, amongst others.

32. The Justice Sector Strategic Plan 2018-2023 seeks to provide improved access to justice services for vulnerable groups including women, People with Disability (PWD) and children through improved infrastructure and facilities, enhanced capacities of justice sector institutions and inclusive services. Furthermore, the Plan outlines operationalization of legal aid as one of the key strategic priorities in the 12th Five Year Plan (FYP). The Plan brings together all the justice sector agencies, including the NCWC for the first time.

33. A legal aid guideline for vulnerable women and children was developed by the NCWC in collaboration with key justice sector agencies in 2021. The Guideline provides clarity and minimum standards for agencies and individuals responsible for providing legal aid. Subsequently, a legal aid program is piloted by the NCWC and RENEW through the engagement of a private legal firm. 10 cases have been processed for judicial intervention under the pilot from October 2021 till January 2022. The pilot supplements the regular legal services provided by the NCWC and its partner agencies, and will be scaled up based on its evaluation.

34. The Human Dignity Clinic, introduced in 2017 by JSW Law, aims to advance the well-being of women, children, elderly and PWD through the provision of free and high-quality legal representation. The initiative also seeks to gather evidence on challenges faced by vulnerable groups in partnership with relevant government agencies and CSOs.

Awareness and advocacy on legal remedies and complaint mechanism

35. To increase women and girls’ awareness on legal remedies and support, a documentary series, “*Yeshey Dawa*” revolving around women’s legal rights and remedies, was developed by RENEW in partnership with relevant stakeholders. The documentary series was disseminated through the media.

36. The BNLI has carried out several legal dissemination programs on relevant legal provisions, rights and remedies. Besides panel discussions, dissemination workshops, school law clubs, distribution of pamphlets and acts, weekly talk shows on the

¹⁵ Attorney.

¹⁶ Council or committee.

national television and radio are also carried out in collaboration with the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS).¹⁷

37. The Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (BCCI) in collaboration with NCWC carried out a capacity building program for 86 female and 54 male private sector employees, including executives and human resources managers, on gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, legal provisions and remedies. Similarly, the NCWC oriented more than 600 employees of corporations and state-owned enterprises on sexual harassment in collaboration with the private sector. The objective of the program is to encourage corporations and private sectors to institute mechanisms for addressing gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment at the workplace.

38. Regular awareness and advocacy program on DVPA and related legislations, GBV and other emerging issues are carried out by NCWC, BNLI, RBP and relevant agencies for the general public through various means.

39. The NCWC, Bar Council and RENEW provides legal counselling and information for women in difficult circumstances and GBV survivors on their rights under the relevant laws, legal remedies and support available to them. 486 women and girls have received legal information and counselling from NCWC and RENEW since 2018.

40. A nation-wide legal needs survey to understand differentiated legal needs, is currently in the initial stages of implementation. The survey is expected to provide information on legal issues faced by the public, gender differentiated experiences in accessing justice services, differentiated legal capacities, and individuals' perception of the process and outcome of legal problems.

National machinery for the advancement of women (Responses to para 5)

Coordination and monitoring mechanism on gender

41. Technical and financial capacity of the national machinery has seen a reasonable improvement, with recruitment of additional officials in both the program divisions. Additionally, a separate protection services managed by experienced counsellors, was established in 2018 to respond to issues related to women and children.

42. The annual GFP meetings, coordinated by the NCWC, serve as primary platform to discuss issues faced by GFPs and NCWC, including coordination issues. Online mechanisms including group forums between NCWC and GFPs were also created to share information transparently. It also facilitates discussion on issues and challenges that GFPs and their respective institutions face with regard to gender.

43. The SOPs, guidelines and protocols outline clear mechanisms between the GFPs and NCWC with regard to coordination on specific issues such as GBV and child protection. Coordination issues are regularly discussed through existing platforms, including the Human Resource Committee and Commission Meetings. Additionally, the internal case management protocol for women and children in difficult circumstances is currently reviewed to strengthen collaboration and coordination between NCWC and the GFPs. The review will focus on communication flow between the NCWC, GFPs at local level, and NCWC's protection officers with regard to GBV response and other cases of women in difficult circumstances.

¹⁷ National radio and television channel.

44. The NCWC finalized the Gender Equality Monitoring System (GEMS) in 2016 to ensure sound implementation of gender related activities by the focal points. The GFPs report annually on the progress made against the indicators and targets assigned to their respective sectors. The reports are generated and presented during the annual focal point meetings, where recommendations to accelerate the progress are also made by the NCWC and other relevant agencies. The GEMS has enabled NCWC to gather timely progress of gender interventions and strengthen accountability of the GFPs.

45. In the financial year 2016-17 and 2017-18, indicators on the “establishment of childcare centres at workplace” and “development of internal framework to address gender issues at workplace” were integrated in the Annual Performance Agreement (APA) as mandatory targets for all government agencies. Accordingly, 25 workplace crèches were established and 29 ministries, agencies and LGs have developed their internal frameworks. Progress against these indicators is monitored on a quarterly basis by the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO). The NCWC also monitors the development of internal frameworks and its implementation annually.

46. The preparatory process for the annual State of Nation Report serves as an important platform for NCWC to take stock of gender mainstreaming interventions implemented by the NCWC and relevant government and non-government agencies.

47. Dewa,¹⁸ an integrated dashboard to track and monitor Gross National Happiness Indicator (GNHI), SDGs and development plans launched by the Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC), is an important monitoring tool to track progress on gender equality targets of the SDGs and 12th FYP. The GNHC, with support from NCWC and relevant agencies, update progress against indicators on violence against women and girls and legal and policy framework to prevent gender discriminatory practices periodically.

48. To take stock of the implementation progress of the Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting (GRPB) Strategic Framework, a gender budget analysis of the three pilot sectors - Education, Health and Agriculture - was carried out in 2016. The analysis resulted into the implementation of capacity building programs for the planning and budget officers in these three sectors. Furthermore, an initiative to strengthen the documentation and classification of the national budget with focus on gender is currently underway. It aims to enhance performance and reporting of national budget, particularly gender budgeting.

49. The expenditure chapter of the National Budget report features a subchapter on gender-responsive budget. It consolidates expenditure made on gender specific programs such as health services for women, expenditure on women organizations, and budget for the national machinery. For the Fiscal Year 2021-2022, a total expenditure of Nu. 599.896 million was made,¹⁹ an increase by Nu. 105.781 million from the Fiscal Year 2020-2021 (Nu. 494.115 million).²⁰

Interventions to ensure implementation of gender actions at Local Government Level

50. A dedicated NKRA, “Gender Equality Promoted, Women and Girls Empowered” has been included as one of the Local Government Key Results Area (LGKRA) in the 12th FYP. It provides a window of opportunity for the LGs to mainstream gender in their respective development plans. The KRA is mapped into

¹⁸ Happiness and Wellbeing.

¹⁹ https://www.mof.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/BUDGET-REPORT-FY-2021-22_ENGLISH.pdf.

²⁰ <https://www.mof.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/BUDGET2020-21.pdf>.

their annual work plans to ensure allocation of adequate resources to implement gender interventions. Majority of the Local Governments (LGs) included gender awareness and capacity building in their annual plans amongst others.

51. The NCWC carried out gender mainstreaming training for the Mainstreaming Reference Group (MRG) of 15 districts in 2021 and 2022 to enhance their knowledge and skills on gender mainstreaming. The MRG is responsible for mainstreaming crosscutting issues in their sectoral/LG plans, policies and programs and consists of planning and budget officers, GFPs, engineers and sector heads of agriculture, education and health. The MRG at the central level comprises representatives from agencies working on cross cutting issues like the NCWC, GNHC and Department of Local Governance (DLG). The NCWC also carries out regular training programs for the GFPs to enhance their capacity on gender and gender mainstreaming.

52. To provide guidance for the sectors to mainstream gender into their sectoral plans, policies and activities, a gender mainstreaming guidelines and toolkit for selected sectors was developed in 2021. The toolkit will complement the Gender, Environment, Climate Change, Disaster and Poverty (GECDP) framework developed by the MRG.

53. The Local Development Planning Manual (LDPM) 2014 was revised taking into consideration the changing dynamics in planning and budgeting, along with emerging issues at the local government level. The revised plan requires LGs to integrate gender into the planning process, including ensuring equal participation of women. The implementation of the plan is expected to strengthen accountability and ownership of local governments to address gender issues.

54. The NCWC, with support from the Gender Expert Group, has developed a Gender Training Manual to address capacity gaps of the GFPs and other relevant officials in a sustainable manner. It is the first-of-its-kind in the country, and is aimed at institutionalizing capacity building programs on gender and gender mainstreaming. It will also enable the GFPs and other relevant agencies to carry out capacity building, including awareness and sensitization programs, in their respective sectors/areas of jurisdiction.

Gender stereotypes and harmful practices

55. Bhutan recognizes gender stereotypes and harmful social and cultural practices as an impediment to the realization of gender equality goals, and therefore accords high priority to addressing these practices. The NGEP aims to address gender stereotypes and harmful practices across all domains and provides for a multi-sectoral approach to addressing these norms and practices. Furthermore, the NPAGE adopts a two-pronged approach to addressing gender stereotyping - through a specific critical area and mainstreaming it throughout the other nine areas.

56. To promote positive portrayal of women in the media and ensure the implementation of the guidelines on reporting on women and children, the NCWC continues to build the capacity of media professionals. For instance, a training workshop on gender sensitive reporting was conducted for 20 media professionals and journalists, including individual bloggers, in April 2021. Additionally, the Chairperson²¹ of the NCWC also led a consultation with the media to discuss the portrayal of women and children. A set of recommendations were adopted for implementation as an outcome.

57. The NCWC regularly monitors reports on the violation of rights of women and children, and gender related issues by the media so that reports are made in line with

²¹ Current chairperson of the commission is the Hon'ble Foreign Minister of Bhutan.

the standards. Issues regarding violation of the guidelines are raised with the Bhutan Media Council (BMC), which sets standards for media institutions in Bhutan.

58. A study on the valuation of women's unpaid care work was carried out in 2019 to document gender dimensions of unpaid care work, highlight the quantitative significance of women's unpaid care work, and provide recommendations to reduce women's unpaid care work burden. Two regional and national level workshops were organized to disseminate the findings of the study. Key recommendations from the study were included in the NGEF and NPAGE for implementation. Possibilities of integrating these recommendations in the GNH and labour force survey are also being explored to ensure regular and sustainable collection of data.

59. To address stereotypes and prejudices around gender division of roles and encourage men and boys to share unpaid care and domestic responsibilities, the NCWC launched a media campaign #BetterTogether in 2020. The campaign featured men from all walks of lives sharing their experiences of sharing household work and importance of shared responsibilities at home.

60. A GBV primary prevention pilot project, *Gakey Lamtoen*, was launched on 25 November 2018. The project, through its engagement with caregivers and adolescents, aims to address the harmful social and cultural norms and practices, the root causes for GBV against women and girls. Based on the positive impact and promising potential in influencing social transformational change, the NCWC in partnership with the Ministry of Education (MoE), is carrying out a larger scale pilot of the project in three schools and communities in 2022. This roll out is expected to gather further evidence to institutionalize primary prevention nation-wide.

61. To understand the extent of harmful traditional practices like child marriage, a secondary analysis on child marriage using the data from Bhutan Living Standard Survey (2012 and 2017) was conducted in 2018. The findings revealed that the incidences of child marriage have decreased from 8.7 percent in 2012 to 5.5 percent in 2017. Similarly, a study on marriage and cohabitation practices in Bhutan was carried out in 2019 to understand the changing trends, attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation, and consequences of different types of marriage and cohabitation practices. The findings contributed to the development of interventions of the NCWC and relevant partners to address child marriage.

62. NCWC and its partners continue to focus on educating the general public and young people on harmful impacts of child and forced marriages, including penal provisions prohibiting such practices. A C4D strategy for child protection and wellbeing was developed in 2019 to help raise awareness on harmful social and cultural practices that increase children's vulnerabilities to violence, exploitation and neglect. The strategy seeks to address these norms and address knowledge gaps on positive parenting. Subsequently, an initiative for a nation-wide Ending Violence Against Children (EVAC) campaign is underway to prevent emerging child protection issues.

Policy screening

63. All public policies continue to be screened through the GNH policy screening tool. "Gender equality" is one of the criteria for screening. The NCWC is included in the screening committee of all relevant policies to ensure that the policies are gender responsive. In addition, the policy formulation protocol of the government requires all the policy proponent agencies to mainstream cross cutting issues in the policies and engage GFPs of the respective sectors to ensure that gender is mainstreamed adequately.

Mechanism to ensure implementation of the NGEF

64. As outlined in response to the list of issues in para 2, the NPAGE was developed through a consultative process to ensure effective implementation of NGEF. It is aligned with the principles of the Constitution of Kingdom of Bhutan, concluding comments from the CEDAW reports, SDGs and other relevant national, international and regional instruments. The NGEF is also accompanied by an implementation plan with specific actions, indicators and targets against each policy statement.

65. The Government Performance Management System (GPMS) and the annual report on situation of women and children serve as important monitoring mechanisms for the implementation of the NGEF.

Temporary special measure (Response to para 6)

Special measures to increase women's participation in decision making

66. The National Plan of Action to Promote Gender Equality in Elected Offices (NPAPGEEEO) was developed in 2016. It was revised in 2019 based on the recommendations from the second and third national conferences on “Women and Politics” organized by the NCWC, in collaboration with Bhutan Network for Empowering Women (BNEW),²² to take a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges faced by women. The revised plan takes an inclusive approach to promoting women's political participation, drawing on the globally recognized “Gender at Work” framework.

67. The government and its CSO partners continue to implement initiatives to prepare aspiring women leaders for Functional Literacy Test (FLT), one of the factors constraining their participation in local government elections. Further, the Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB) extended the registration for FLT by a week to allow aspiring women leaders to participate in the election and 104 additional women benefited from this. Additional FLT centres were also established at the block and sub-block levels to encourage aspiring leaders, particularly women, to participate.

68. The ECB allowed citizenship identity card as identifying document while voting in 2021 to address the difficulties faced by the general population, particularly women, disadvantaged populations, and those in remote areas to access voter photo identity card. Similarly, paper ballot facilitation and mobile voting booth were initiated during the third LG election support voters participate in elections from their place of residence.

69. As a special measure to increase women's participation in decision making in the corporate sector, “the Corporate Governance Guidelines for State Enterprise 2019” provides for inclusion of “gender” as one of the criteria for selection of the Board of Directors for state-owned enterprises. Similarly, the Corporate Governance Code for the Druk Holding and Investment (DHI) consider gender as one of the determinants for selection of its Board of Directors. Women constitute about 25 percent of the total Board of Directors²³ for the DHI companies.

70. The DHI developed a policy framework on gender equality in 2021 to provide a gender equal working environment in which all employees can realize their full potential and contribute to organizational success. The policy requires DHI and its companies to develop internal mechanisms to promote gender equality at work place. Subsequently, the respective companies conducted awareness on gender equality,

²² BNEW is a CSO working towards increasing women's participation and representation in leadership, governance and development in Bhutan.

²³ <https://www.dhi.bt/board>.

sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination for their employees. The companies are also in the process of developing internal mechanism to address gender issues, particularly sexual harassment.

71. To prevent gender-based discrimination in the recruitment, selection and transfer of police personnel and to promote a gender friendly environment, the RBP has appointed a permanent senior female police officer in the Human Resource Committee (HRC). Furthermore, representation of female police officers is also ensured in the Police Service Board (PSB). Special considerations are also made for capacity building opportunities with preference given to female police personnel. The number of female police personnel (commissioned, cadets and non-commissioned) increased from 435 in 2016 to 656 in 2021.

72. Women's participation in decisions related to water resource management is given due consideration in the National Water Policy with specific mention of women's representation in planning, development and management of water resource programs. In addition, the National Water Resource Management and Plan recognizes women's role in water resource protection and management, and highlights the need to engage women as equal partners in all decisions regarding water resources management.

Awareness on TSM

73. The NCWC, in collaboration with its CSO partner – BNEW, organized the second and third national conferences on Women in Politics, Leadership and Governance in 2017 and 2018 respectively. The Thimphu Declaration endorsed at the 2nd WIP Conference, called for fast track measures to be laid down to achieve the targets for women in the Parliament and local governments. Besides providing networking platforms for women leaders to share their experiences, the conferences aimed to foster a wider and deeper understanding about gender, patriarchy and the need for affirmative action.

74. The Bhutan Women's Parliamentary Caucus (BWPC) - a joint initiative of the NCWC and BNEW – was launched in 2019 to advocate for women's representation in decision making. It is a visible and inclusive platform for women political actors, aspirants and supporters to network, dialogue, advocate and inspire each other to further the goal of gender equality in leadership across all sectors.

75. In addition to the regular awareness and engagement programs of the NCWC on the importance of creating right conditions to achieve de-facto equality across all sectors, dialogues and debates on temporary special measures, quota in particular, were covered through the media. The intent was to demystify misunderstandings around TSM and to create acceptance among decision makers on such special measures.

Stereotypes and harmful practices (Response to para 7)

Mechanisms to address gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices

76. The Standard for Inclusive Education²⁴ was approved in 2017. It outlines gender equality as one of the standards, and recommends all schools to develop a culture where boys and girls are treated with equality, valued and supported. It puts emphasis on the need to review practices and plans of the schools to overcome gender

²⁴ <http://www.education.gov.bt/wp-content/downloads/publications/publication/Standards-for-Inclusive-Education-in-Bhutan.pdf>.

inequality, while simultaneously working with the community to sensitize on gender equality.

77. A module on gender and governance for postgraduate students at the Royal Institute of Management (RIM) was launched in 2020. Comprising of sessions on different thematic areas, the module aims to engage students in exploring the importance of incorporating a gender perspective in governance, including design, implementation and evaluation of public policies and programs. Additional gender integrated modules on Economics, Principles and Application, and GNH were also introduced that will enhance students' understanding and knowledge on gender related issues in macro-economics and the broader development goals.

78. Based on the recommendations from relevant agencies and independent reviewers on the need to make the school curriculum more inclusive and gender sensitive, the school curriculum for all classes and subjects were reviewed and revised. The new curriculum is more gender sensitive and aims to eliminate gender stereotypes and attitudes through the elimination of illustrations that reinforce gender stereotypes. Additionally, a specific module on gender is integrated in the social studies curriculum for class five with the objective of transforming gender stereotypical mindsets from a very young age.

79. As part of efforts to inculcate gender equal values and mindsets in children, GBV and SRH are integrated in handbooks of all sections of the school scouting program. Among the nine key concepts on gender, GBV and SRH, the third concept focuses specifically on socio-cultural construction of gender norms and overcoming inequality and biases.

80. The Bhutan GBV prevention pilot reported in response to issues under para 5, aims to eliminate the root socio-cultural discriminatory practices and beliefs that cause GBV. The project supports communities to bring about social norms change from within, by identifying and building on community strengths, critically examining harmful behaviour, and supporting positive change.

81. A specific national study to analyse the discriminatory gender stereotypes and practices was not conducted during the reporting period. However, a number of studies on gender were carried out that led to better understanding of gender roles, stereotypes, discriminatory practices and perceptions. For instance, the nationwide study on the prevalence of violence against women and girls in 2017 revealed that around 53.4 percent of women and girls agreed that a man is justified in hitting their partners under certain circumstances. 28.9 percent of women and girls who experienced sexual and/or physical violence still believed that men are superior to women.

82. The assessments on Gender and Climate Change (2020) and Accounting for Unpaid Care Work in Bhutan (2019) found the existence of deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and practices, particularly with regard to gender division of roles, which often limits women's opportunity to participate in formal employment. The impact of COVID-19 on women and girls (2021) also revealed similar findings.

83. A qualitative assessment of men and boys' perception on violence against women and girls was conducted by RENEW in 2021. The study revealed increased awareness among men and boys, and a gradual shift in their mindsets with regard to gender division of roles and discriminatory practices that lead to violence against women.

84. A book on integrated social messages, “Tsechui Garcham Gyi Shegpa”²⁵ was launched in 2017 by His Holiness the Je Khenpo²⁶ as a way to advocate for the elimination of discriminatory gender norms and practices through national and local festivals by engaging the religious bodies. Over 150 religious personnel, including the heads of monastic institutes, were trained. The books were also distributed to cultural officers across all districts for implementation.

85. Efforts to eliminate patriarchal attitudes and discriminatory stereotypes around gender norms through advocacy and awareness were carried out by different agencies and individuals at different levels. For example, the periodic high-level advocacy by UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador is aimed at challenging the harmful social and cultural norms that perpetuates discrimination and violence against women and girls. Awareness on gender issues and harmful practices like child marriage were also conducted by the GCFPs, CBSS and Multi- Sectoral Task Force (MSTF)²⁷ members.

86. A television talk show, *Moghi Mikhar*²⁸, featuring guest speakers from all walks of life discussing gender, relationships, feminism, parenting and harmful practices such as GBV and child sexual abuse was organized by RENEW in collaboration with the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) and Bhutan Media Foundation (BMF). Likewise, a series of radio talk shows on issues related to adolescent girls like self-esteem and body image, menstrual hygiene, mental health, sexual harassment and abuse, and sex education were carried out through the #GirlTALK campaign on Facebook and Instagram in 2018.

87. A documentary on unpaid care and domestic work was developed and disseminated through the media by RENEW with the objective to create awareness on women’s triple burden and its consequences on their access to opportunities outside the home. In addition, the international days on women and girls, observed every year, serve as important platforms to create awareness on gender and related issues.

Mechanisms to review interventions to address discriminatory practices

88. In addition to the monitoring mechanisms reported in response to the list of issues in *para 5*, the *Dzongkhag/Thromde*²⁹ Women and Children Committee (D/TWCC) serves as an important mechanism for the coordination and monitoring of interventions at the local level.

Gender-based violence against women (Responses to para 8, 9 and 10)

Section 22 of DVPA

89. An assessment of the implementation progress of the DVPA and its rules and regulations were carried out in 2020 to understand the implementation status and relevance of certain provisions of the Act. The assessment recommended review of some provisions (including section 22) to take into consideration recent developments. As such, the review will be initiated together with the implementation of the other recommendations.

²⁵ Explanation on mask dances.

²⁶ Head of religious body in Bhutan.

²⁷ Task force established at the LG level to address HIV.

²⁸ Through her eyes.

²⁹ Municipality.

Capacity of law enforcement agencies

90. The government takes a two-pronged approach to enhance the capacity of the RBP through the integration of women and child friendly police procedures in the police training curriculum and targeted capacity building on specific issues. More than 100 police personnel were trained in 2020 and 2021 on GBV, GBV SOP and early identification and safe referral. 58 additional officials were also trained on women and child friendly procedures by the RBP. Training materials on specialised police service provision for survivors of GBV is under preparation with plans to train police personnel across the country by June 2023.

91. Two additional Women and Child Protection Units/Desk (WCPU/D) were established in 2019 and two more are currently under construction. This takes the total number of such units/desks to 17. The RBP plans to establish 18 WCPU/Ds across the country by 2023. As indicated in the earlier reports, these units and desks are managed by trained police personnel, including at least one female member. 1559 cases of domestic violence and 339 cases of sexual exploitation and abuse were investigated between 2019 and February 2022.

Multisectoral support system

92. A SOP on GBV Prevention and Response was put in place to strengthen the institutional mechanism and streamline procedures to prevent and respond to GBV. The SOP also outlines multi-sectoral response mechanism and roles of key actors. A Training of Trainers along with the development of training materials on GBV SOP was carried out in 2019 and 2020. A mapping of services was also carried out to establish a comprehensive and well-coordinated referral pathway for responding to GBV survivors.

93. A GBV case management guideline was also developed to implement the SOP and institutionalize case management as a critical GBV service. 101 women and 61 men, including protections officers, GCFPs, counsellors from RENEW and Nazhoen Lamtoen³⁰, and selected CBSS volunteers were trained on the SOP and GBV case management. These officials serve as case managers in various districts and ensure adequate provision of services to GBV survivors. Furthermore, capacity building of the specialised GBV providers is underway. Pocket guides for front-line workers and specialized service providers, including case managers, were also developed and disseminated.

94. A guideline for management of survivors of sexual and intimate partner violence in the primary health care centres was developed in 2020 to strengthen health sector response to GBV. 35 forensic focal persons from the primary health centres in 8 districts were trained. Likewise, to ensure access to immediate multi-sectoral services, a helpline response team was instituted in all districts. An SOP was also adopted to guide the response team to discharge their responsibilities in line with minimum standards.

95. The SOPs and guidelines, along with referral pathways and capacity building of case managers, frontline workers and specialized service providers, enable a well-coordinated multi-sectoral response to GBV survivors.

96. A “women and girls’ safe space” is being piloted in three districts by RENEW, in collaboration with NCWC and DPs to ensure easy access to counselling and other services. The safe spaces are managed by trained staff, comprising of safe space managers and case managers. The pilot will be scaled up upon its impact evaluation.

³⁰ A CSO supporting children and youth in conflict with law and children in difficult circumstances

Access to safe shelter and transport services

97. Although a dedicated assessment to establish a demand for shelters at the national level has not yet been carried out, the DVPA implementation progress assessment revealed a shelter services gap, particularly at the local level. Furthermore, the demand for shelter services was also established through the national survey on violence against women and girls (2017) and the impact assessment of COVID-19 on women and children (2021).

98. The *Gawailing Happy Home* shelter in Thimphu continues to provide shelter services to survivors of GBV. 921 survivors of GBV, including women and children in difficult circumstances, of which 689 are girls (and female child) and 107 are adult women benefited from the service. A girls' hostel was also established as part of the shelter to cater to the needs of young girls.

99. Seven MSTF-CBSS service centres, which houses transit shelters and provides counselling and related services, were established in 2020. The service centres are managed by trained CBSS volunteers under the overall supervision of the RENEW secretariat and MSTF member secretary. A standard operating procedure for the management of these centres is also in place to ensure smooth operation, management and monitoring of these services.

100. The temporary shelters established across the country during COVID-19 under Her Majesty the Gyaltsuen's command greatly contributed to addressing issues related to access to shelter, psychological support, and safe transportation faced by survivors of GBV.

Corporal punishment

101. An early childhood parenting model with a thematic approach to address the health, learning and protection needs of young children is currently being implemented. It recognizes the role of parents in improving the well-being and developmental outcomes of children. Through the implementation of this model, parents engage in dialogues that enable them to share their experiences and support each other. In addition, April is observed annually as "parenting month", during which the school guidance counsellors and the Career Education and Counselling Division (CECD) organizes a number of programs to advocate for positive parenting.

102. The draft National Child Policy provides a specific policy framework to prohibit all forms of abuse and violence against children. It includes elimination of corporal punishment across all settings and promotes positive discipline. While discussion to amend section 109 of the PCB 2004 continues, the endorsement of the policy along with interventions on positive parenting and discipline is expected to result in reduction of the prevalence of corporal punishment.

Comprehensive law on GBV

103. As reported in response to list of issue in para 2, depending on the implementation status and challenges of the NGEP and DVPA, a comprehensive needs assessment for a GBV law will be undertaken.

Prevalence of GBV during COVID

104. As per the assessment of the COVID-19 impact on women and children, six percent of the adult respondents reported to experiencing GBV, with majority of them reporting emotional violence. The proportion of women experiencing violence was found to be slightly more than men. The reported cases to various service providers also saw an increase during the pandemic.

105. The cases which are petty in nature are prosecuted by the RBP and only those which are considered misdemeanour and above are prosecuted by the Office of Attorney General (OAG). The OAG has prosecuted a total of 21 domestic violence cases between 2019 and 2021, and 22 cases of non-partner GBV against women between 2019 and 2022. Likewise, the RBP has prosecuted 313 cases of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) between March 2019 and February 2022.

Legal aid for survivors seeking interim protection/protection orders

106. In addition to legal aid for survivors of GBV interventions reported in response to the list of issues in *para 4*, the survivors who require protection orders are supported by case managers to seek legal assistance from relevant service providers. The legal assistance and services are also made available at the local level through GCFPs who are majorly legal officers. Furthermore, efforts are underway to integrate application of interim protection/protection orders in the eLitigation platform in collaboration with RCJ.

107. To monitor and ensure implementation of the interim protection/protection orders, RCJ shares the copy of these orders with the NCWC protection officers in cases where it is deemed necessary.

Measures to eliminate social acceptance of GBV

108. In addition to the initiatives reported in response to the list of issues under paras 5 and 7, the #HeforShe campaign was another initiative to engage men and boys for GBV prevention.

109. Regular awareness programs on gender, GBV and SRH are carried out for the general public and schools by the NCWC and RENEW to eliminate social acceptance of violence within the family and community structures. For instance, more than 20 schools took part in an awareness program in 2017. Advocacy workshops on GBV and other related issues were also carried out in 2018 for the chairpersons of 20 *dzongkhag tshogdues*³¹ and 30 religious leaders. A number of issues and challenges to address GBV in their respective communities were discussed and a plan of action was also developed for implementation.

Awareness programs for judiciary and law enforcement agencies

110. A training on GBV SOP and early identification and safe referral was carried out for the representatives of RBP and RCJ across the districts by the NCWC and RENEW. In addition to the SOP, the training also focused on gender stereotypes and prejudices, and key GBV concepts. Furthermore, representatives of the RCJ and RBP are also included as master trainers for the GBV SOP to institutionalize capacity building on GBV and the SOPs.

111. The BNLI carries out annual orientation and training programs for judges and clerks on legislations and judicial procedures related to women and children.

Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution (Response to para 11 and 12)

National Prevention Strategy and SOP for multisectoral response

112. The SOP on Multi-sectoral Response to Trafficking in Persons was finalized and approved in 2019 for implementation. The SOP is a significant step towards

³¹ Highest decision-making body at the district level

instituting a systematic mechanism to address TIP. It outlines specific procedures for identification and referral of survivors. A special task team with representatives from relevant agencies, including NCWC and RENEW, was formed to support implementation of the SOP and improve coordination among agencies. The task team is also responsible for the development and review of plans and interventions on TIP.

113. The National Prevention and Response Strategy was launched in 2022 to enhance bilateral, regional and multilateral coordination for effective prevention, protection and repatriation of TIP survivors. The strategy is also accompanied by an action plan with interventions to be implemented by relevant agencies over the next three years.

Prosecutions, convictions/sanctions for perpetrators and services for survivors

114. As outlined in response to the list of issues in para 2, the definition of TIP in the Penal Code (Amendment) Act of Bhutan 2011 was amended in 2021 to align with the definitions under the Palermo Protocol.

115. The OAG prosecuted five cases of trafficking of women and girls for overseas employment in 2020, including two continuing cases from 2019. The convictions for the perpetrators ranged from one and half years for aiding and abetting, and attempted trafficking to four years and six months for trafficking. In addition, investigation of 30 individuals suspected of trafficking 160 women for overseas employment is ongoing, with the support of a special investigation team comprising of officials from the RBP and Department of Law and Order (DLO). 187 cases of labour trafficking were received and investigated between 2019 till date by the RBP, DLO and relevant agencies.

116. The DLO coordinates with NCWC and relevant CSOs to provide rehabilitation, psychosocial, livelihood and reintegration services to the survivors. A needs assessment of 160 survivors rescued from the middle-east in 2020 was carried out in addition to providing counselling services. 21 women were provided with shelter services and 63 enrolled in vocational training programs with RENEW.

Mutual legal assistance

117. The DLO is in the process of drafting the Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) Bill in collaboration with relevant agencies. The bill is expected to be submitted to the Cabinet for further directives. In the meantime, the existing mechanism and forums between the RGoB and bordering states of India, such as the border district coordination meetings between the RGoB and the State Governments of Assam and West Bengal, India discuss and resolve concerns related to border management and security, including trans-border crimes like TIP.

Awareness and capacity building

118. To enhance the understanding of TIP and address its root causes, the DLO in collaboration with NCWC and DPs carried out 32 awareness campaigns, reaching more than 4361 vulnerable populations and 653 officials from relevant agencies. In addition, online advocacy materials were developed and disseminated through the media. The Blue Heart Campaign was also carried out through the reality television show (*Druk Super Star*) to promote awareness on countering TIP.

119. 120 frontline workers were trained in 2020 to increase their capacity in identification and referral of TIP survivors. A training manual for judges was also developed and 21 judges subsequently trained in 2021 by the DLO, in collaboration with BNLI.

120. While there are no dedicated shelter services in the country for survivors of TIP, they are accommodated in the existing shelters for women and children operated by the CSOs. The shelter operated by RENEW provided services to 21 survivors of TIP in 2020. In addition to the procedures for survivor protection in the SOP on multi-sectoral response to combating trafficking, the GBV SOPs and guidelines on establishment and management of shelter services and internal operating manual for the shelters also provide clear procedures and minimum standards for the protection of TIP survivors.

Women in drayangs and prostitution

121. To understand the situation of women and girls working in *drayangs*, and to identify critical areas of concern and exploitation, a situational analysis of drayang employees was carried out by the NCWC in 2017. The analysis included a complete enumeration of female *drayang* employees in major urban areas. Based on the findings, the study recommended systemic and structural reforms of the *drayangs* to prevent employees from sexual exploitation and engaging in commercial sex.

122. Due to the vulnerability of *drayang* employees, particularly to sexual exploitation, social stigmatization and discrimination, the government directed the closure of *drayangs* in January 2022 following consultations with relevant agencies. The decision was to protect female employees from exploitation and provide them with alternate livelihood and employment opportunities. Subsequently, the MoLHR initiated reintegration programs and 526 female employees registered for these programs.

123. The mapping of vulnerable groups and skills development program during the COVID-19 reported in response to the list of issues in *para 3* is another initiative to provide alternate economic opportunities for the *drayang* employees.

Participation in political and public life (Responses to para 13)

Measures to increase women's participation in decision making

124. In addition to the targeted interventions reported in response to the list of issues in *para 6*, awareness on the importance of women's participation has been integrated in the civic and voter education program of the ECB. The advocacy materials were developed and widely disseminated in both mainstream and social media.

125. Working towards the 3rd LG Elections of 2021, BNEW mobilized and sensitized over 2387 potential and aspiring women candidates, and trained more than 380 women in leadership and interpersonal skills. In addition, several rounds of regional consultations were organized to provide networking platforms to discuss issues, challenges and opportunities. At the same time, potential candidates were also oriented on the situation of women and men in the country, emerging gender issues, new policy and programmatic development, and key skills necessary for participation in elections.

126. As reported in response to the list of issues in *para 6*, the media continues to play a critical role in supporting the work of NCWC, ECB, DLG and BNEW to advocate for women's leadership roles through its coverage of stories on their personal and political experiences, situational analysis of women in the political arena, and other relevant gender issues. The government also provides capacity development opportunities for media professionals on gender and gender sensitive reporting on a regular basis.

127. An Internal Framework to Address Gender Issues at Work Place is currently under implementation to enhance knowledge of employees on gender equality and

key concerns such as sexual harassment and remedies for survivors. The framework also highlights the need to strengthen working conditions for female employees through the establishment of gender-friendly facilities such as workplace creches, feeding rooms and separate toilets with required amenities; and increase women's representation in decision making. Currently, there are 29 ministries and agencies including LGs and corporations implementing this internal framework.

128. The establishment of workplace creches is prioritized by the government to reduce the burden of working parents, particularly mothers, and encourage their participation in all spheres. A guideline for the establishment of creche centres in Bhutan was also developed in 2018 to ensure minimum standard of the services. There are currently 21 agencies including the LGs and corporations with functional creches. The NCWC, in collaboration with MoE and MoH, carries out regular capacity building of the creche caregivers.

129. To address challenges faced in sustaining the creche services, including the lack of qualified caregivers, a modality for sustainable operation and management of creche services was developed and endorsed for implementation in 2021.

130. The Gender Equality Strategy (2018-2023), developed by the RCSC in collaboration with NCWC is under implementation. The strategy aims to increase women's representation at the executive level to 15percent by 2023. As part of the implementation, the RCSC conducted a series of leadership training for senior female employees. In addition, a dedicated AKRA, "gender equality in civil service promoted" is included in the 12th FYP to ensure institutionalization of gender equality efforts within the work of the RCSC.

131. The RCSC organised a 'women in executive leadership development workshop for achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world' in collaboration with Queensland University of Technology, Australia in 2021. 11 women and two men participated in the workshop. In addition, the commission identified and trained 36 potential women leaders through its 'Building a Support Foundation for Women Leaders' program in 2021 and 2022.

132. To improve the wellbeing of civil servants, the RCSC established the Civil Service Support Desk (CSSD)³². Through this initiative, the RCSC provides a platform for civil servants to seek counselling support and report issues related to sexual harassment. It also includes the "Go To Person" to support survivors of sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination. The NCWC is also included as a reference point for specialized interventions. Moreover, the RCSC sensitized all the human resource officers on the prevention of sexual harassment at the workplace. Orientation on the same was also carried out for 650 new recruits in 2018.

133. The NCWC in collaboration with BCCI and UNDP initiated the Sustainable Development Services (SDS) program in the private sector to address gender issues in the private sector and increase women's participation. As part of the program, a gender assessment in four pilot companies was carried out. A training program on gender mainstreaming, sexual harassment and related issues was also organized in 2021 for more than 100 employees of private companies and 25 employees of BCCI and sector associations.

Measures to review Public Election Fund Act of Bhutan 2008

134. Deliberation to assess the feasibility of providing state election funds for local government elections is underway. The discussion will look into the benefits of election funds for the candidates vis-à-vis the socio-economic situation of the

³² <https://www.rcsc.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Annual-Report-2019-2020.pdf>.

country. Appropriate measures will be put in place based on the outcome of the discussions.

Education (Response to para 14 and 15)

Measures to address gender gap in education

135. The gender parity index for tertiary education improved from 0.81 in 2017 to 1.06 in 2021.

136. The NGEF provides for strategic framework to address gender gaps particularly in tertiary education. The implementation of the policy is expected to strengthen coordination and alignment of sectoral efforts to improve girl's participation in tertiary education, including in technical and vocational education. Additionally, the draft National Education Policy takes into consideration gender, socio-economic status and other vulnerabilities as criteria for entry into tertiary educational institutes. The policy also emphasizes on gender friendly infrastructure, facilities and curricula and pedagogy as an important intervention to address gender gaps in education.

137. The MoE continues to build the capacities of school principals and teachers as one of the key interventions to create a gender friendly teaching and learning environment to strengthen girls' participation in education. Gender responsive teaching and learning, and safety of students are integrated as part of the regular professional development programs of the teachers. Awareness on gender and rights of women and girls are also conducted during the annual education conferences.

138. The MoE provides support for adolescent mothers to continue their education along with opportunities to change schools and psychosocial support by certified counsellors. 147 secondary schools across the country have certified school guidance counsellors as of 2020.

Dis-aggregated information on dropout rates and continuing education

139. The MoE's Comprehensive disaggregated data on education is collected and managed through the web-based Education Management Information System (EMIS). The system has key indicators on net enrolment rate, dropout rate, survival rate, gender parity index, and continuing education among others, disaggregated by age and sex.

140. A qualitative study on dropout, repetition and children who never attended school was carried out using data from the Population and Housing Census of Bhutan (PHCB) 2017. The study revealed poverty as one of the underlying causes for dropout among school children. Furthermore, the impact assessment of COVID-19 on women and children also looked at the prevalence of dropouts among boys and girls due to the pandemic. Three percent of parents/caregivers (3.1 percent male and 2.9 percent female) reported their children dropping out of school.

141. 93 women and 74 men benefited from the continuing education program and 3629 women and 1439 men from the Non-Formal Education (NFE) program in 2021. The community learning centres provide life-long learning opportunities for those with basic and post literacy courses and out of school youths. 310 women and 34 men benefited through these centres in 2021.³³

³³ <http://www.education.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/AES-2021-Final-Version.pdf>.

Comprehensive sexuality education

142. The first ever National Strategic Framework on Comprehensive Sexuality Education was launched in 2021 to ensure uniform and systematic implementation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in the schools. It is integrated in seven subjects from class PP-XII. Subsequently, the school management and staff were trained. A separate subject on CSE is also taught in all schools. The CSE and life skills education are also available in *Dzongkha*,³⁴ and taught in monasteries and nunneries.

143. All teacher trainees undergo a full 60 hours non-credited module on CSE. The colleges of education also developed a CSE facilitator's manual for use by the trainees. Regular conferences and seminars on adolescent SRH are also organized by the colleges of education, engaging parliamentarians, academia, public servants, CSOs and DPs.

144. Modules on GBV and SRH are integrated in the scout's handbook, and the scout leaders are trained on the revised handbook. This initiative will enable the students to learn about sexuality education through various outdoor learning and team work.

145. CSE competence training and adapted CSE learning materials were developed for visually impaired in-service teachers and students in 23 priority schools across 16 districts, including Muenseling³⁵ Institute and its two sister schools in Khaling.

Measures to encourage girls to take up traditionally male dominated field of study

146. In the 12th FYP, the MoE is implementing various interventions to promote technical and vocational education, which are considered to be male-dominated fields of study. This includes a framework on Technical and Vocational Education (TVET) from class PP-XII and alternative pathways through curriculum infusion in classes PP-III; vocational clubs in Class IV-VIII; pre-vocational orientation program in classes VII-VIII; and school TVET courses as electives in classes IX-XII.

147. TVET was introduced as an optional subject in class IX in seven pilot schools during the 2020 academic year and will be rolled out to classes X-XII in subsequent years. Additional training instructors are also recruited, trained in pedagogy and placed in the pilot schools. The integration of TVET in schools is expected to eliminate the stereotypical barriers that deter girls from taking up these fields.

148. To eliminate traditional stereotypes around gender occupational segregation and promote Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) courses and related occupations among girls, the Bhutan National Commission for UNESCO in collaboration with relevant government agencies organized a winter camp in 2021 providing robotics, coding and scientific skills among others. 48 girls participated in the camp.

149. Nine Bhutanese scholars, including five women, participated in a capacity building program with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in 2020 as part of a multi-year Interagency Agreement to strengthen the foundations of science, technology, engineering and mathematics in Bhutan. The program and their experiences were disseminated through the media to encourage more girls and young women to take up these fields of study.

150. The major power companies in the country are implementing interventions across four pillars - promoting STEM education among girls; recruiting women

³⁴ National language.

³⁵ The first special needs school in Bhutan.

employees; offering professional development opportunities to women employees; and adopting policy and institutional changes to increase women's participation in the power sector. This is initiated to fulfil the commitment as an institutional member to the South Asia Women in Power Sector Professional Network (WePOWER).

151. The TVET Blueprint (2016-2026), that articulates a long-term strategic vision to guide reforms and new development in the sector, is under implementation by the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources (MoLHR). The strategy recognizes the need to increase women and girl's participation in the sector through strategies such as creating gender-friendly environments. 283 women and girls were enrolled in eight Technical Training Institutes (TTI) under the MoLHR in 2021.

152. Women and girls have been increasingly pursuing training and employment in male-dominated areas. Between 2020 and 2021, 293 women participated in construction related skills projects such as carpentry, masonry, welding, plumbing, painting and wiring. Further, of the 3,219 trainees who participated in short-term vocational training programs organized by the MoLHR between 2020 and 2021, 40.35 percent were women and girls.

Employment (Responses to para 16)

Labour force participation of women

153. The Labour Force Participation (LFP) for women saw an increase from 63.5 percent in 2020 to 65.3 percent in 2021. The LFP rate for men was found to be higher in the urban areas, while for women it was higher in the rural areas. This is mainly due to the majority of women being engaged in the agriculture sector. While the overall unemployment rate has decreased from 5 percent in 2020 to 4.8 percent in 2021, the unemployment rate for women increased from 6 to 6.1 percent in the same period.

154. The Cottage and Small Industry (CSI) Policy 2019 provides an overall policy framework to promote women's participation in CSI through the development of a diverse pool of CSIs to match the demand of the labour market. It has a special focus on gender equality and preferential business development services. Target interventions include capacity building of women entrepreneurs and the institutionalization of awards such as the "women entrepreneur of the year" to encourage participation of more women entrepreneurs.

155. Creating opportunities for productive and gainful employment is one of the key focus areas of the 12th FYP. Towards this, strategies have been put in place which include diversifying the economy; accelerating the growth of tourism, manufacturing and CSIs; providing dedicated job placement services; skilling the workforce; promoting entrepreneurship, and incentivizing LGs to create employment opportunities.

156. The government launched the Youth Engagement and Livelihood Program (YELP) in 2019, where wage subsidy support for job seekers and opportunities for on-the job experience are provided. 620 female and 394 male youths benefited from the program. Up until the pandemic, the government continued to implement the Direct Employment Scheme (DES) to increase youth's employability. 752 male and 885 female job seekers were engaged from July 2017 to June 2018.

157. The Build Bhutan Project was initiated in July 2020 as part of the economic contingency plan during the pandemic. It focused on reskilling youth to work in the construction industry. It has trained 535 young women and 1587 men, and engaged 309 women and 741 men in the construction and 93 women and 587 men in the

hydropower sector. As a result of the initiative, 54 specialized firms have also been established.

158. The Skills Development Program was launched in October 2021 as a collaboration between the MoLHR, CSOs and government and private training providers. It supports skilling of the workforce, particularly the youth. An environment and social assessment was also carried out to ensure that the program is responsive to the needs of all genders, and that the environment is conducive for female job seekers. 185 men and 103 women have completed the program as of April 2021. There are currently 226 men and 173 women undergoing their training.

159. The Critical Skills Training Program is also being provided in partnership with public and private training providers. Most of the courses offered by the program are gender friendly. It also targets people with disabilities. Further, access to online skilling and freelancing opportunities in partnership with a number of online platforms were also initiated.

160. The government initiated the Startup Flagship Program in the 12th FYP to create a culture of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship through integration in the school curriculum. Besides, entrepreneurship training programs are also provided to potential and aspiring entrepreneurs to stimulate and support the establishment of their own businesses. 413 women and 376 men benefited from the program in the last two years.

161. To understand the underlying causes, key structures and patterns that drive youth unemployment, a systems mapping of youth unemployment was carried out by the MoLHR in collaboration with relevant government and non-government partners. Subsequently, a systemic portfolio-based approach report - a strategic plan to address youth unemployment using a portfolio-based logic - was launched in March 2021. The report recognized gender norms and division of roles, lack of appropriate childcare facilities, among others as some of the factors constraining women and girls' participation in the labour market. It recommended implementation of targeted interventions, such as female-focused employment growth to achieve gender equality in the employment sector.

162. The Accelerated De-Suung Integrated Training Program, an initiative led by His Majesty The King, absorbed youth who were either unemployed or displaced because of the pandemic. The program provides a series of accelerated training by local and foreign experts. 7,922 were trained in the general category, 3,947 in water management, 1141 in National Accelerated Dog Population Management and Rabies Control Programme and 1388 in Million Fruit Trees Plantation project.

Measures to encourage equal sharing of family responsibilities

163. The NGEP seeks to encourage women's participation in formal employment through the implementation of strategic interventions which would reduce the burden of women's unpaid care and domestic responsibilities and encourage equal sharing of responsibilities within the household. The NPAGE also has specific actions to reduce disproportionate burden of women's unpaid care work, including strengthening the measurement of women's unpaid care work and encouraging men and boys to share equal responsibilities. Other initiatives were reported in response to the list of issues in para 6.

164. As reported in response to the list of issues in para 13, the government accords high priority to the establishment of creche facilities at the workplace for children between 0-3 years. The modality for the sustainable operation and management of creche facilities was developed by the NCWC in collaboration with the MoH and MoE to ensure its sustainability.

165. The government continues to enhance the accessibility of children to Early Childhood and Care Development (ECCD) facilities. The ECCDs also serve as childcare facilities for working parents, including those in the rural areas engaged in agriculture sector. As of 2021, there were 8026 children (3936 girls and 4090 boys) enrolled in 495 ECCDs across the country, including 432 operated by the government and 63 by private institutions.

166. The National Multisectoral ECCD Strategic Action Plan 2030 is currently being finalized by the MoE, in collaboration with relevant government and non-government partners. The Strategic Action Plan is expected to provide the best holistic conditions for every child to survive and develop through a well-coordinated approach.

Measures to address gender occupational segregation

167. The Construction Policy 2020 seeks to address the employment needs, particularly of women and youth. The Policy states that, “the Ministry and procuring agencies shall include employment generation at the core of construction planning and programs to address the employment needs of the country, particularly women and youth”.

168. The TVET blueprint seeks to address gender gaps in the TVET, which is a traditionally male dominated area. Efforts are being made in technological advancement, conducive infrastructural facilities in the TTIs (such as female hostels, crèche facilities), diversification of courses and curriculum responsive to gender needs, and digitalization and mechanization of traditionally male-dominated sectors. Other measures reported in response to the list of issues in para 16 (i) contribute to addressing gender occupational segregation.

169. More women have entered the OAG as state prosecutors in the recent years which can be attributed to the increased number of women completing legal studies, gender friendly work environment, and the socio-economic development which makes it more conducive to travel for prosecution. The number of female prosecutors in OAG increased from 22 in 2017 to 28 in 2021.

Measures to address employment disparity between rural and urban areas

170. The government continues to build skills of the rural population in various trades such as electrification, mechanics, plumbing, basic culinary among others through the Village Skills Development Program (VSDP). 57 women and 21 men benefited from the program between July 2020 and June 2021. Support to establish small businesses after completion of the training is also provided. Further, a three-year Youth Employment and Rural Entrepreneurship Project is under implementation. The project is expected to create 400 additional jobs with the establishment of 100 enterprises in the six south-western districts.

171. “*My gakhid village*”, implemented by the Youth Development Fund (YDF)³⁶, is a holistic community development project that provides sustainable livelihood opportunities in the rural areas as a strategy to mitigate rural-urban migration. The project focuses on creating community-based eco-tourism and environmental conservation projects, reviving traditional arts and crafts through livelihood initiatives, and providing IT literacy and livelihood skills for the rural youth.

172. The Renewable Natural Resource (RNR) Marketing Policy 2017 provides significant opportunities to institute special programs to encourage the private sector in RNR processing, and empower women and youth to participate in RNR marketing.

³⁶ A CSO working for empowerment of youth in the country.

173. Given that women are largely engaged in the agriculture sector, farm mechanization and introduction of women-friendly farm machineries continue to receive priority in the 12th FYP. The government aims to develop 100,000 acres under cultivation and additional 6746 acres under mechanization through the supply of gender-friendly and geographically suitable farm machineries by the end of the plan period.³⁷

174. The Rural Food Security and Agricultural Productivity Project and the Commercial Agriculture Resilient and Livelihood Enhancement Program (CARLEP), implemented by the MoAF, are targeting at least 30 percent women beneficiaries to increase women's livelihood and economic opportunities in the rural areas. Likewise, the Resilient Mountain Solution project is expected to increase women's resilience to socio-economic and environmental changes through capacity building in income generating activities and supply of women-friendly farm machinery.

Health (Responses to Para 17, 18 and 19)

Access to Maternal health and family planning services

175. The Policy to Accelerate Mother and Child Health Outcomes 2020 provides a strategic policy framework to strengthen the availability and accessibility of quality Mother and Child Health (MCH) services. The policy strengthens help seeking behaviour, knowledge of MCH services, and promotes shared responsibilities between the parents.

176. The 150-bed Gyaltsuen Jetsun Pema Mother and Child Hospital is under construction. The first phase of the community health block is operational and provides post and ante-natal services. The second phase is expected to be completed by the end of 2022. A similar 65-bed hospital will be constructed in the eastern region to cater to the more rural communities.

177. The updated National Family Planning Standards (2018) outlines minimum standards and procedures for provision of quality family planning services and enhanced supervision in line with the World Health Organization (WHO)'s Medical Eligibility Criteria (MEC) and the Standard Practice Recommendations (SPR). Accordingly, family planning services are available across all Health Facilities, including the Basic Health Units (BHUs). It is also available in remote communities through the support of voluntary Village Health Workers.

178. Various interventions, including awareness and advocacy, are underway to increase the contraceptive prevalence rate to 70 percent by the end of 12th FYP. The government discarded the requirement for women to submit details of her partner details of her partner while availing contraceptives from the health facilities.

179. The government successfully inserted 1506 new IUD services, injected 79309 DMPA, conducted 4376 vasectomies and 4586 tubectomies, and provided 60608 cycles of oral pills and 1.1 million condoms between 2020 and 2021. In addition, the pharmaceutical outlets are allowed to sell contraceptives, including birth control pills and emergency contraceptive pills.

Access to sexual and reproductive and adolescent friendly health services

180. The National Adolescent Health Strategic Plan provides a comprehensive framework for the provision of multi-disciplinary and well-coordinated adolescent health services in the country. Adolescent health care packages, including sexual and

³⁷ <https://www.doa.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/12FYP.pdf>.

reproductive health, are available to all boys and girls through the Adolescent Friendly Health Services (AFHS) Clinics and designated focal persons across different hospitals. Currently, AFHS clinics in 11 districts provide integrated comprehensive adolescent-friendly SRH information and services.

181. The AFHS focal persons and clinics facilitate direct access to SRH services, including follow-up and referral, within the health facilities for specialized services. The clinics and focal persons also work closely with the communities to generate demand for AHFS. 45 designated focal persons are based in 25 hospitals across the country.

182. An AFHS training manual was developed to institutionalize capacity building of health workers. The manual offers standardized training to both in-service and pre-service health care providers. In addition, the revised national family planning manual for health workers includes specific components on family planning for adolescents. The manual is expected to enhance the knowledge, abilities, and skills for providing quality, rights-based, client-focused family planning services across the country.

183. In addition to response to the list of issues in para 5, the national midwifery guideline was revised to include management of teenage pregnancy. The revised guideline is expected to improve care for teenage mothers and their children, including referral mechanisms.

184. Bhutan New-born Action Plan (BENAP), a road map towards accelerating the reduction of new-born death, is currently under implementation. It lays out specific actions to prevent teenage pregnancy through enhanced counselling services for adolescent girls, early identification, and appropriate medical services.

185. The interventions to enhance awareness among adolescents to address patriarchal attitudes and gender norms are reported in response to the list of issues in paras 5, 10 and 15.

Termination of pregnancy and post-abortion services

186. Section 146 of the PCB allows for medical termination of pregnancies in cases where there is risk to the mother's life, or when the pregnancy is a result of incest and rape, or where the mother is in unsound mental condition.

187. The standard guidelines for management of complication of abortion for health workers highlights the need to provide post-abortion services with respect and in an unbiased manner to increase their access to all services, including post-abortion family planning and contraception counselling.

188. A SOP for medical termination of pregnancy for the Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital (JDWNRH) is currently being developed to ensure timely provision of services in line with minimum standards. It will also provide clear procedures for the hospital staff and relevant agencies, including referral mechanisms. The SOP is expected to be finalized by the end of 2022.

Interventions to reduce number of suicides among women and girls

189. Suicide prevention and reduction is a priority area for the government and targeted interventions are in place to reduce the overall suicide rate to less than 12 per 100,000 population by July 2023. Awareness and advocacy on suicide prevention, capacity building of service providers, strengthening institutional mechanism to address suicide related issues are some of the measures.

190. The Bhutan Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan (2018-2023) and the Suicide Prevention in Bhutan - A Five Year Action Plan (2018-2023) are currently under implementation. The plans adopt a multi-sectoral approach and outline roles of

all individuals and agencies in supporting the prevention of suicide, while identifying key institutional services and capacity gaps in providing timely, appropriate and quality mental health and psycho-social services.

191. With growing evidence highlighting the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of children and young people, the Parliamentary Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs carried out a review of the situation. The Committee's report was deliberated during the 27th session of the National Council in June 2021. The recommendations from the session were thereafter submitted to the government for consideration. In addition, extensive consultations with mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS) service providers were also carried out by UNICEF in collaboration with national agencies.

192. Between 2020-2021, the MoE and NCWC, in collaboration with relevant government and non-government partners, launched two online campaigns to normalize and promote action on mental health for children and youth: "Project *Gawa*"³⁸ in 2020 and #OnMyMind in 2021. Subsequently, the MoE and NCWC helplines saw an increase in the number of cases received by the end of the campaign (from 204 cases received between March and August to 528 in one month of the campaign). In addition, 552 children and 278 female youth sought counselling services after the campaign.

193. Recognizing the critical role of counsellors in providing mental health and psycho-social support to students and young people, capacities of the school guidance counsellors are enhanced through regular training on family intervention and psychosocial support (PSS). Between 2020-2021, 177 counsellors (84 Female) were trained to provide PSS and MHPSS.

194. To support children in distress, one teacher from each school across Bhutan were trained in PSS and thereafter identified as the PSS focal person for their respective schools. A referral mechanism has also been instituted to ensure proper and timely referral between the counsellors, MoE and agencies such as the NCWC and relevant CSOs. In addition, the implementation of the SOP on child protection case management will further strengthen the referral mechanism. A guidance note to provide remote MPHSS and counselling was also developed and 147 counsellors have been trained.

195. A dedicated Mental Health and Psychosocial Response Team (MHRT) has been established during the pandemic. Free helplines at the national and community levels for Counselling, screening and referral of those at risk to appropriate services were also established in March 2020. More than 1500 people with mental health and substance abuse related issues availed these services between 2020 and 2021. Continuous awareness and information on services are provided through different media outlets. Furthermore, to ensure early detection and provide services to those at risk, more than 20,000 health workers, counsellors and volunteers were also trained on PFA and suicide prevention.

196. The interventions reported in response to the list of issues in para. 16 are significant steps to prevent women and girls from committing suicide due to economic distress. The *Kidu* program, under the HM's Secretariat including the Relief *Kidu* is another significant social protection measure that is expected to contribute in preventing suicide and distress during the pandemic.

197. Rehabilitation services for alcohol and drug users are provided in collaboration with the CSO partners, except detoxification and rehabilitation services for CICL, which are provided by the hospitals and the RBP. NCWC and its partners assist in

³⁸ Happiness.

ensuring services are free of cost to women and girls in difficult circumstances, including survivors of GBV, who require rehabilitation services. Regular monitoring, follow-up and aftercare services are also provided.

198. The “Pema Centre”, a special initiative of Her Majesty the *Gayltsuen*, was initiated in November 2021. In addition to the 60-bedded hospital, the Centre will also provide outpatient consultation and counselling, emergency and treatment services. Once fully operational, it is also expected to provide services on mental health to families and friends and engage them the recovery process. The Pema Centre Secretariat was also established in 2022 to spearhead the national response to mental health and oversee the functioning of the centre.

Rural women (Responses to para 20)

Poverty reduction, employment and economic empowerment

199. The overall objective of the 12th FYP is to create a “just and harmonious society” through poverty reduction, creation of gainful employment, economic diversification, quality health and education services, and access to justice. As such, the current plan adopts a multisectoral approach to reduce poverty and inequality that will contribute towards the achievement of NKRA 3: “reducing poverty and inequality”.

200. The poverty rate has dropped from 12 percent in 2012 to 8.2 percent in 2017. Similarly, there were also significant reductions in the Multidimensional Poverty, with the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) falling from 12.7 percent in 2012 to 5.5 in 2017. However, MPI is higher for females (6.6 percent) as compared to males (5.4 percent).

201. The start-up and CSI development flagship program amongst others is one of the significant strategies through which the government seeks to diversify the economy, create employment, reduce poverty and promote gender equality. Given the huge potential of the sector for inclusive and sustainable livelihood and economic development, the flagship program aims to promote high-growth potential CSIs that can support livelihood and economic empowerment opportunities for the rural population, of which majority are women.

202. Regular skills enhancement and capacity building programs are carried out by the government. 10037 female farmers were trained through CARLEP project implemented in six eastern districts. In addition, regular capacity building and marketing support is provided by the RNR research centres and agriculture extension offices in the respective districts and blocks. 952 female and 603 male farmers were trained on organic farming, vegetable and fruit tree cultivation, and land management between July 2019 and June 2021.

203. To supplement the government’s initiatives, Tarayana Foundation,³⁹ trained 567 women on organic farming, food and nutrition between 2020 and 2021. The Foundation also carried out spring shed management training at community level to 220 women beneficiaries in the last two years.

204. Small Development Projects (SDPs) aimed at enhancing socio-economic development of rural communities is another significant poverty reduction intervention implemented at the local level. The projects are expected to improve the livelihood of rural communities through enhanced accessibilities, increased jobs and economic opportunities, and food security.

³⁹ CSO that works to uplift and enhance disadvantaged communities in Bhutan.

205. In addition to the livelihood enhancement and skills building initiatives reported in response to the list of issues in *para 16*, increasing women's participation in community groups, cooperatives and SHGs are pursued as important initiatives for social and economic empowerment of rural women. As of May 2022, there are 100 cooperatives and 666 farmers groups under the MoAF. Women constitute about 50 percent of the total membership of both cooperatives and farmer groups.

Access to finance

206. The CSMI Development Strategy (2012-2020) and Action Plan (2015-2018) outlines clear strategies to promote women entrepreneurs and facilitate their access to finance. Accordingly, five microfinance institutions, namely National CSI Development Bank (NCSIDBL), Tarayana Foundation, Bhutan Care Credit Limited, RENEW, and BAOWE⁴⁰ were formally registered to improve access to finance among disadvantaged groups, including rural women. RENEW's micro-finance program benefited 26014 people, of which 90 percent are women. Similarly, Tarayana Foundation and BAOWE's group savings and lending scheme supported around 3000 members, of which 70 percent are women.

207. The National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2018-2023 (NFIS) articulates the country's road map for financial inclusion. Recognizing the gender gaps in terms of access to credit, the strategy identifies CSI and the agriculture sector, areas where women are mostly engaged in, as the priority sectors for financial inclusion in the next five years. Similarly, the Financial Inclusion National Action Plan (FINAP) 2019-2023 aims to strengthen access to formal financial services through the use of digital technology and the establishment of access points; to increase SMEs credit portfolios owned by women; and to strengthen the financial literacy and education programs for the rural communities. The Action Plan also requires all financial literacy training and awareness interventions to have at least 40 percent female participants.

208. Emphasis is made by the government to form credit and savings cooperatives in the rural areas to enhance access to micro-finance for the group members. As such, the MoAF has facilitated the formation of six such cooperatives with 321 members, of which 288 are women.

Access to education, health and justice

209. The establishment of central schools is an important intervention to improve the quality of education and provide a conducive environment to study for the rural children, especially girls. It is also expected to reduce the drudgery of travelling to and from schools for children and ensure their safety. As of 2020, there were 41134 students enrolled in the central schools across the country, of which 21595 were girls.

210. Access to education for those who missed the opportunity to avail formal education, mostly in the rural areas, is improved through the NFE program. In addition to basic literacy, the program also educates NFE students on life-skills, health and sanitation, and numeracy. As of July 2021, there were 3629 female and 1439 male NFE learners in 482 centres across the country. Furthermore, the continuing education program for those who are not able to complete formal education also provide opportunity to continue their education. 93 girls and young women benefited from the program in 2020.

211. The CLCs, established by the MoE, offers lifelong learning opportunities for those with post literacy courses, out-of-school youth, and literate adults, including nuns and monks. The CLCs also organize a wide range of community-based

⁴⁰ CSO that works towards creating enabling business environment for women.

development programs in health, agriculture, life skills-based education, and entrepreneurial skills based on the needs of respective communities. There are currently 26 such centres with 344 learners, of which 90 percent are women and girls.

212. The mobile medical services and telecommunication facilities initiated under the royal command supplements the government's effort to provide health services to the remote and unreached communities. In addition to outpatient services, the mobile medical service also conducts tests and screening for diseases.

213. The essential health service delivery plan package implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic prioritized MCH services, particularly in the rural areas. The plan package included extended programs on immunization, antenatal care, institutional delivery, postnatal and family planning services. Services were delivered at the doorstep via mobile clinics and telemedicine facilities. Mobile cardiotocography services were also provided in 46 health centres across the country. 2177 pregnant women benefited from the services during the pandemic.

214. A number of health camps were organized as part of the national health flagship program to increase access to health tests and screening services. 8068 women were screened for cervical and breast cancers through the camps, with 90 percent coverage. Those requiring further services were referred to regional and referral hospitals. Additional equipment for maternal health was also procured in the last two years to improve quality of services.

Access to and control over land

215. The Land Act of Bhutan 2007 provides for equal right and access to land ownership for all individuals irrespective of sex. Likewise, the Inheritance Act of Bhutan 1980 guarantees equal entitlement to all true members of a joint family to receive inheritance irrespective of gender. As of 2016, women constitute 47.3 percent of the land ownership, while men hold 48 percent of the ownership, and 4.7 percent is under joint ownership.⁴¹

216. The land use certificate program for youth was introduced in 2016 to enhance the productive use of land and promote gainful employment by venturing into large scale economic activities. Around 2,500 graduates were oriented on the program and its benefits. As of 2018, six youth groups comprising of 58 members have availed the program and are currently working on various projects.

217. The social and economic empowerment interventions outlined in response to the list of issues in paras 13, 16 and 20 are also aimed at increasing women's control over economic and financial resources, including control over land.

Women's participation in agricultural and rural development plans

218. The revised Local Development Planning Manual (LMDP), reported in response to the list of issues in *para* 5, provides for equal participation of women in all decisions at local level. Furthermore, the government has revitalized the concept of *Chiwog Zomdues*⁴² to ensure meaningful participation of communities in the local development planning process. An assessment of the functioning of *Chiwog Zomdues* in selected communities reported equal participation of men and women, while highlighting the need to strengthen women's active and meaningful participation.

219. Majority of the interventions including multi-year projects carried out in the agriculture sector provides for mandatory participation of women in the decision-

⁴¹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7qProQS0jENUW4xU3VKUFNfVjQ/view?resourcekey=0-ekz_R3yWVgi-Z7G86ogZJw.

⁴² Meeting at sub-block level.

making process, including ensuring that the decision-making process is gender friendly. The National Water Policy and National Water Resource Management Plan also seek to ensure equal participation of women in decisions regarding water resource management.

Disaster risk reduction and climate change (Responses to para 21)

Disaster risk reduction

220. The Disaster Management Act of Bhutan 2013 provides legal basis to ensure that women are adequately represented on the Disaster Management Committees, both at the national and local level. Section 134 of the Act also requires the state to take special care of children, women, elderly and PWD during rescue, response and relief interventions. Accordingly, capacity building and awareness on the importance of women's representation in decision making and gender, climate and disaster risk reduction were carried out for the LG administration and relevant sector heads.

221. The Bhutan Disaster Assessment Tools (including the Household Level Assessment) was developed through a participatory approach involving women and girls and agencies working for women and children. The tools are inclusive of the needs of women and girls, such as SRH and protection services during and post-disaster situations.

222. As part of the implementation of the AKRA 6 of the 12th Five-Year Plan on "carbon neutrality, climate and disaster resilience", the SOP on disaster management was developed with an emphasis on gender and children.

223. The NGEP seeks to address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by women and girls, including those living with HIV/AIDS and affected by climate change and disasters. Additionally, "gender, climate change and disaster risk reduction" is also included as one of the key critical areas in the NPAGE.

Environment and climate change

224. Towards ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment in the environment sector, the National Environment Strategy 2020 outlines gender-responsive development as a key approach. The strategy also recognizes differential impacts of environmental degradation on men and women, and emphasizes the key role of women in natural resources management.

225. The Climate Change Policy of the Kingdom of Bhutan 2020 seeks to address gender issues by integrating gender in all climate actions through comprehensive situational and gender gap analysis. The Policy requires identification of gender differentiated climate change opportunities and challenges through meaningful participation of men and women and accordingly address them through provision of adequate means of implementation, including gender friendly technology, finance and capacity building.

226. Given the important role that women play in water resource management as well as the disproportionate impact of water shortage on women and girls, the Sectoral Adaptation Plan of Action (SAPA) for the RNR sector seeks to protect watershed and water sources through integrated watershed management practices.

227. The NCWC, in collaboration with the National Environment Commission (NEC), is currently implementing a project on gender-responsive Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to strengthen institutional capacities of the selected NDC sectors. Through the project, a gender mainstreaming toolkit and guidelines was also developed to support the sectors in preparation of the 13th FYP and the 2nd NDC.

228. The NCWC carried out a gender assessment in selected NDC sectors - Agriculture, Waste and Energy - to gather evidence on gender issues, challenges and opportunities, and to inform policy and programmatic interventions. Based on the recommendations from the assessment, discussions on the inclusion of the NCWC in the Climate Change Coordination Committee (C4), a technical body for coordination of climate change related matters in the country, is underway. Furthermore, the formulation of Bhutan's 2nd NDC and low emission development strategies of industries, food security, transport and human settlement is guided by the findings from the assessment.

229. The National Adaptation Plan (NAP) is currently under formulation. The NAP is informed by the Gender Sensitive Vulnerability Assessment undertaken in the priority sectors of Agriculture, Forest and Biodiversity, Health, and Water. Besides setting adaptation priorities, the NAP will be an important national instrument to integrate climate change adaptation into the overall development planning and resource mobilization strategies of the country.

230. The climate resilient and transformational change in agriculture project, with support from the Global Climate Fund (GCF) aims to enhance women's access to resources and knowledge on climate resilient water resource management designs and technology. The project has specific gender targets on women's participation in water and agricultural resource management decisions. In addition, the two National Accredited Entities of GCF, Bhutan For Life and Bhutan Trust Fund have developed a gender action plan in environment and climate change, which is currently being implemented.

231. In addition to the efforts of NCWC, NEC and selected NDCs towards mainstreaming gender in climate change and disaster risk reduction, the Mainstreaming Reference Group (MRG) reported in response to the list of issues in *para 5*, serves as an important institutional mechanism to formulate and implement gender responsive climate change and disaster risk reduction actions.

Disadvantaged groups of women (Responses to para 22)

Initiatives for disadvantaged group of women

232. The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (PWD) 2020 provides a strategic and coherent policy framework to improve the lives of PWDs through their full and meaningful engagement in socio-economic development as equal members of the society. It also seeks to address the challenges faced by them in accessing services. The Policy also highlights on the need to address needs of women and girls with disabilities and ensure their participation in leadership positions.

233. The provision in the Penal Code of Bhutan that criminalizes unnatural sex was repealed by the Parliament in 2021. This amendment promotes the rights of LGBT+ and enables them to exercise their human rights without fear of discrimination. Additionally, the NGEP also seeks to address issues faced by the LGBT+ community through enhanced collection of evidence and targeted interventions.

234. The NGEP is currently under review to integrate the needs of LGBT+ in collaboration with Pride Bhutan⁴³ and Queer Voice of Bhutan⁴⁴. The review is expected to complete by end of 2022.

⁴³ Community led organization to create an inclusive and enlightened society where LGBT+ individual can achieve their full potential.

⁴⁴ Advocacy platform to create visibility and reduce stigma and discrimination against LGBT+.

235. To create a supportive environment where individuals with diverse gender and sexuality have access to healthcare services, education and employment, and other opportunities, the development of the Pride Bhutan toll free helpline operational manual is underway.

236. Access to justice for PWD project is currently being implemented through the Justice Sector Program (JSP). The project focuses on addressing physical accessibility, enhancing understanding of issues faced by PWD, and institutionalizing capacity building through integration in the curriculum of JSW law school. In addition, eLitigation initiative reported in response to the list of issues in *para 4* is another important initiative to enhance access to justice for PWD.

237. 1710 (854 male and 856 female) PWD received support from DGRK at least once between April 2020 and March 2022. Likewise, 473 (324 male and 149 female)⁴⁵ above the age of 65 years also received kidu at least once in the same timeframe.

238. A National level consultation was held to identify the SRH needs and experiences of GBV of PWD and LGBT+. Accordingly, revision of the family planning standards has been undertaken to incorporate family planning needs of the LGBT+.

239. Special procedures for responding to PWD, LGBT+ and elderly GBV survivors are included in the SOP on GBV prevention and response, and the GBV case management guidelines. Case managers including those at the LG level, identified CBSS volunteers and officials from partner CSOs were trained on these procedures for effective implementation. Efforts are also underway to strengthen the coordination mechanism between the case managers and CSOs working for the PWD and LGBT+ in relation to GBV response for these groups.

240. A concept note for national policy for senior citizen is currently under finalization by the GNHC in collaboration with Royal Society for Senior Citizen (RSSC)⁴⁶ to improve care and protection of elderly.

241. In accordance with the government's pledge to narrow the accessibility gap and promote people-centred health services with care and compassion, dedicated time is allocated for elderly people to seek health services. Periodic screening for diseases is also conducted every year in October, which has been declared as the month of the elderly. A dedicated handbook for the elderly to provide critical health related information and keep track of their health conditions, is also developed and distributed free of charge.

242. The ECB has established separate voting facilities for PWD to address challenges regarding their physical accessibility and encourage them to participate equally in elections. Furthermore, options for voting from their place of residence are also facilitated for those who are unable to go to the polling stations.

243. Four businesses in candy manufacturing, musical tutoring, bakery and tailoring were established benefiting 30 PWD (15 Male and 15 Female) in 2021. A disability equality training was conducted by the Disabled People's Organization (DPO)⁴⁷ and the government for 69 (45 Male and 24 Female) participants including from service providers and monastic institutions in 2020.

244. The performance audit by the Royal Audit Authority on the SDG implementation will specifically evaluate the government's efforts to strengthen capacities for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global

⁴⁵ Data from DGRK.

⁴⁶ CSO led by senior citizens to promote the welfare of senior citizens.

⁴⁷ CSO led by PWD dedicated to service of all PWD.

health risks. A more equitable public health system that ensures access to quality services for vulnerable sections of the population, including but not limited to women, PWD and those from the lower socio-economic groups, is one of the expected outcomes, among others.

Situation of women in prison and detention facilities

245. In accordance with Chapter four of the Prison Act of Bhutan (1982), which states that ‘female and male prisoners must be kept separately in Jail. In case, no provision exists, room partitions should be made for female and male prisoners’, separate detention facilities are provided for male and female detainees. Where there is no separate facility, they are detained in separate rooms. Separate hostel facilities for girls are also available in the Youth Development and Rehabilitation Centre (YDRC).

246. To provide prisoners with an opportunity to prepare for reintegration after the prison term, an open-air prison for women was established. At the open-air prison, the inmates engage in income-generating activities such as weaving, organic farming, knitting and mask making. The children residing with their mothers are also provided with ECCD facilities and schools in the vicinity. Currently, there are 44 female inmates with 15 children.

Measures taken to facilitate return of refugee women and girls

247. The issue of people in the camps in Eastern Nepal is not that of a typical refugee situation but a complex one deeply rooted in illegal immigration. The governments of Bhutan and Nepal have been engaged in bilateral discussions for many years. The two governments also regularly engage on the sidelines of regional and international gatherings to address the issue. The Royal Government of Bhutan appreciates the resettlement program initiated by the Core Group of Countries and believes that the third country resettlement programme is the most viable solution to this complex issue.

Marriage and family relations (Responses to Para 23 and 24)

Legislative measures for child custody

248. The Marriage (Amendment) Act of Bhutan 2009 mandates the Royal Court of Justices to take into consideration certain circumstances that may not be in the best interest of the child in decisions regarding child custody. The circumstances include neglect, abandonment, and maltreatment of the child, amongst others.

249. The CCPA provides that all actions concerning children undertaken by the government, non-government or private social-welfare institutions, court of law, administrative authorities, family members or individuals shall be in the best interest of the child. The family environment, parent’s relationship with the child and the child’s mental and physical wellbeing, amongst others, are considered while determining the best interest of the child.

250. To determine the best interest of the child in child custody cases, the RCJ (Family and Child Bench, in particular) seeks the support of the NCWC protection officers (including the interim protection officers in the *dzongkhags*) to carry out comprehensive assessment on the family environment, risks and benefits of granting the custody to either of the parents. The assessment also takes into consideration the child’s decision.

251. Efforts are underway to review the Marriage Act to address the discriminatory provisions towards women. The review will also take into consideration international,

regional and national gender equality standards and best practices as well as the changing gender dynamics and roles. As such, the provision in the current legislation that considers communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS status as grounds for depriving a mother of her child's custody will be reviewed.

Legislative reform to curb child marriage

252. Current legal framework in Bhutan like the Marriage Act of Bhutan and the Penal Code of Bhutan addresses the issue of child marriages. While the Marriage Act explicitly prohibits child marriage, the Penal Code criminalizes any act of consensual sexual act with a child below twelve years of age as well as a child between the ages of twelve to eighteen years either with or without the knowledge of the other person being a child.

253. Bhutan is part of the Regional Action Plan to End Child Marriage developed by South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) in consultation with the CSOs of eight countries and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Law Chapters. NCWC as the nodal agency, spearheads its coordination and implementation.

254. The review of the Marriage Act will also review the age of marriage for girls, including other measures to address child marriage. The OAG in collaboration with NCWC is in the process of compiling and translating the different amendments of the Marriage Act to ensure its accessibility and to create uniform understanding of the Act.

255. The National Child Policy is under finalization which will provide overall policy directives on enhancing the protection mechanism for children from harmful practices, including violence, neglect, and child, early and forced marriage. It is further expected to improve multisectoral collaboration towards more effective child protection and wellbeing services.

256. The draft National Education Policy, once approved, will serve as an important policy decision to provide equitable, inclusive and quality education, and lifelong learning opportunities to all children. This will prevent harmful practices like child marriage. Support to children from disadvantaged families is also being provided to encourage their enrolment in formal education.

257. Continued efforts are being made by the government and its CSO partners to prevent early, forced and child marriage through awareness and advocacy programs. A nation-wide campaign on adolescent related issues such as self-esteem and body image, menstrual hygiene, sexual harassment and impacts of early and child marriage is one such initiative.

Support to single mothers and their children

258. The enforcement of child support and divorce agreements entered through both formal (via court order) and informal means is implemented by the enforcement units of the respective courts. The parties (particularly mother) can submit a petition to the court in an event of refusal to provide child support as per the court order or divorce agreement.

259. The government, in collaboration with its partners, provide economic and other forms of support to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, including single parents and separated mothers. Livelihood activities such as skills building programs are conducted for survivors of GBV and single mothers towards supporting them to be economically independent.

260. Single mothers were provided with relief support during the COVID-19 pandemic to help sustain them economically and meet expenses of their children. 1733 single mothers received kidu from the DGRK since April 2020.

261. Women-Owned Open Market (WOOM) and “BAOWE bazaar”, initiatives to empower economically disadvantaged women in major urban centres, support single mothers, uneducated and unemployed young women to market their vegetables, home-made food and dairy products. Necessary infrastructure and equipment such as a sales outlet and yogurt processing equipment are provided.

262. The *Gyalpoi Tozey*⁴⁸ supports needy children by providing support for their education. Under the scheme, the students receive a certain amount of allowance, either monthly or annually, based on their level of education. The beneficiaries are mostly orphans, children of single parents, and disabled students from poor socio-economic backgrounds. As of 2019, the scheme currently supported 1,478 girls, of which 1,410 were between Class PP and Class XII, and 68 pursuing tertiary education.

263. The government provides support to mothers of children born in and out of wedlock without discrimination. Agencies like NCWC, RBP and RCJ support in tracking fathers in situations where their whereabouts are not known. In addition, the mothers who are economically deprived are provided with monetary support to pursue DNA tests.

264. As reported in response to the list of issues in para 23, the best interest of the child is a primary consideration made in all decisions regarding child custody as well as for visitation rights. Conducive family environment is one of the key indicators for assessment carried out by the RCJ and protection officers for child custody. In addition, the capacity building of judges and bench clerks on child justice and psychology is geared towards ensuring safety and wellbeing of every child.

265. The initiative to review the marriage act, as outlined in response to the list of issues in para 23, will take into consideration the issue of domestic violence, which will provide further protection to the child and mother.

⁴⁸ A scheme for needy children under the His Majesty's Office.