



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Committee on the Rights of the Child

Combined fifth to sixth periodic reports submitted by Oman under article 44 of the Convention, due in 2022* **

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



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Combined fifth to sixth periodic reports submitted by Oman under article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Drafted by the

Follow-up committee on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

June 2022

Introduction

1. The Sultanate of Oman submits to the Committee on the Rights of the Child its combined fifth to sixth periodic reports under article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in line with paragraph 75 of the Committee's concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports. In those concluding observations, adopted on 29 January 2016, the Committee invited Oman to submit its next periodic report by 7 January 2022, in compliance with the Committee's harmonized treaty-specific reporting guidelines adopted on 31 January 2014 (CRC/C/58/Rev.3).

2. Beginning on 1 September 2019, the Committee has allowed States parties to submit their periodic reports under the simplified reporting procedure. Oman accepted the simplified procedure and made a request in that regard to the Committee on 15 July 2019, a request the Committee approved on condition that Oman would receive the list of issues in June 2021 and submit its report by 15 June 2022. The follow-up committee on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child duly began drafting the report. The committee, which is part of the Ministry of Social Development and is chaired by the Undersecretary of that Ministry, comprises experts as well as representatives from ministries and other governmental entities and civil society organizations. A list of members of the committees responsible for drafting the combined fifth to sixth periodic reports is to be found in annex 1.

3. The present report was drafted at the same time as the updated common core document forming part of the reports of States parties under international human rights treaties (HRI/CORE/OMN/2019), which Oman submitted on 9 May 2019, in line with paragraph 76 of the concluding observations. In that paragraph, the Committee invites the Sultanate of Oman to submit an updated core document, in accordance with the requirements for the common core document in the harmonized guidelines on reporting under the international human rights treaties, including guidelines on a common core document and treaty-specific document (HRI/GEN/2/Rev.6, chap. I) and General Assembly resolution 68/268 (para. 16).

4. Oman wishes to draw the attention of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to paragraph 75 of the concluding observations in which the Committee invites Oman to "submit its combined fifth to eighth periodic reports". In fact, under article 44 (1) of the Convention, it is the combined fifth to sixth periodic reports that need to be submitted. The Committee accepted the views of the Sultanate of Oman in this regard and issued an amendment in a memorandum dated 6 September 2016 (annex 2).

5. The follow-up committee on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the Ministry of Social Development duly submitted the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to the Council of Ministers at the latter's regular meeting No. 33-2016 held on 14 December 2016. In its turn, the Council of Ministers recognized the importance of cooperation between government bodies in order to move forward with the implementation, both of the Convention itself and of the concluding observations and recommendations. The Council, furthermore, enjoined the Ministry of Social Development to continue to fulfil the country's obligations vis-à-vis children's rights in the light of the concluding observations. The Ministry then called upon government agencies and civil society groups active in the field of children's rights to examine the observations and recommendations and to inform the Ministry of measures taken and

developments achieved in the various fields of operation, as well as of any new child-related activities. The present report will serve to provide replies to some of those recommendations.

Methodology for the preparation of the report

6. The follow-up committee on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child developed a methodical framework for drafting the combined fifth to sixth periodic reports under the simplified reporting procedure. Over the years 2020–2022, this involved a number of activities, including four training courses on the international reporting mechanism and the drafting of national reports on children’s rights. The courses were attended by members of the committees that had been formed to draft the present report. Further courses in the period 2021–2022 were aimed at the technical team whose job it is to monitor the various stakeholders.

7. On 7 March 2022, the committee held a workshop for children in collaboration with the Children First Association in which 52 youngsters from different categories participated and gave their feedback on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The children were also encouraged to get involved in issues affecting them, and to develop alternative ways of enjoying their rights during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The workshop produced a number of recommendations that focused on aspects of the report such as the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, mechanisms for protecting children from violence and ill-treatment, the rights of children and of children with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of social media on children.

8. The present text has been the subject of extensive discussions. In fact, a high-level consultative meeting to discuss various aspects of the combined fifth to sixth periodic reports under the Convention was held on 24 March 2022. It was attended by representatives from the State Council, the Shura Council, national human rights committees, civil society institutions and international organizations, as well as by children themselves. They all discussed and commented on the draft of the report, which was then rewritten in the light of the comments made. After that, the report was submitted to the Council of Ministers.

I. New developments

1 (a) Adoption or amendment of laws policies and programmes, and other measures taken to develop institutions

9. The Basic Law of State (Constitution) was issued pursuant to Royal Decree No. 6/2021. It took the place of the previous Basic Law, which had been issued under Royal Decree No. 101/96, and thus completed the process of constitutional development in Oman. The Basic Law promotes human rights via provisions that clearly uphold and reaffirm rights that lie at the very core of the principles enshrined in international treaties and conventions. The Basic Law is an expression of the principles upon which the Sultanate of Oman rests. It fortifies the country’s international standing and its role in the promotion of security, justice and stability while upholding public rights, duties and freedoms. The Basic Law underscores the importance of international charters and treaties and of international law in explicit provisions that are intended to direct State policy (art. 14). Article 15 affirms the importance of social principles when it stipulates: “The family, which is the cornerstone of society, is upheld by religion, morals and patriotism. The State shall endeavour to maintain family cohesion and stability, and to consolidate family values. The State shall guarantee equality between women and men, and it undertakes to provide care for children, persons with disabilities, young persons and infants, in the manner prescribed by the law.”

10. In addition to this, the Basic Law of State defines the legal status of the international treaties and conventions that Oman has ratified (arts. 89, 93 and 97) stipulating that national laws and legislation must not violate treaties and conventions between Oman and other States or international organizations. Upon ratification, such treaties and conventions have force of law; they become part of national law and any regulations, decrees or instructions that violate them are inadmissible. In this way, the Basic Law of State underscores the binding nature

and status of international treaties and conventions within the country's legal system and gives them force of domestic law. As His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik stated in his first address on 11 January 2020: "Oman will maintain its role as an active member of the United Nations Organization, a member that respects the United Nations Charter and works with Member States towards achieving international peace and security ... while respecting charters, laws and agreements signed with other countries and organizations."

11. The implementing regulations of the Children's Code were issued pursuant to Ministerial Decree No. 125/2019 on 7 August 2019. They contain 131 articles divided into 6 sections and cover such matters as definitions, child protection, kindergartens, alternative care, family custody, protection mechanisms and sanctions. Two of the sections have subdivisions: section III on kindergartens and section IV on alternative care and family custody. The implementing regulations include many of the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.

12. In paragraph 72 of its concluding observations, the Committee recommended that Oman should consider ratifying a number of international human rights instruments. In that connection attention is drawn to the fact that the State has acceded to the following three international treaties:

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

13. Oman is currently in the process of developing a number of pieces of human rights-related legislation, including on the rights of persons with disabilities, civil society associations and juvenile accountability.

14. The follow-up committee on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was restructured pursuant to Ministerial Decree No. 155/2021. It includes members from government agencies and civil society groups involved in monitoring and follow-up. In that regard, internal working groups have been established by ministerial decrees to act as standing committees for the implementation of the Convention inside ministries and other institutions, including the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour and the National Centre for Statistics and Information. These groups follow up on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols by monitoring programmes and projects, and collecting information, data and indicators on measures taken in the field of children's rights.

1 (b) Measures taken to protect children's rights during the COVID-19 pandemic

15. In line with the statement concerning the COVID-19 pandemic released by the Committee on the Rights of the Child on 8 April 2020, it should be noted that, with the global spread of the pandemic, Oman immediately put measures in place to address it. Following instructions from His Majesty the Sultan, a supreme committee was formed to examine mechanisms whereby to deal with developments resulting from the spread of COVID-19, in the light of data, health indicators and information made available by the World Health Organization (WHO). The supreme committee is also responsible for monitoring COVID-19-related developments and regional and global efforts to tackle it, overseeing steps taken in that regard and developing solutions, proposals, recommendations and decisions based on the results of public health assessments. The State has acted to support health-care institutions with human resources and medical equipment and appliances to enable them to provide health care and to uphold justice and equality.

16. A specialized committee has been set up to provide vaccinations against COVID-19 and to draw up a national immunization plan. The committee has adopted vaccines on the basis of their effectiveness and safety for different age groups, then worked to deliver the approved vaccines and other medication. The committee has also developed regulations and plans to ensure that vaccines are available and distributed to all governorates, in order to

ensure the maximum level of coverage among the target groups, including children between the ages of 12 and 18, pregnant women and persons with disabilities.

17. A number of awareness-raising activities for children, parents and society at large have been rolled out. These have been delivered using various media channels and via the hashtag “#ForOmansChildren” on social media sites. Educational materials for children have been distributed, such as videoclips on how to test children suspected of being infected with COVID-19 and an online guide for persons caring for children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

18. In cooperation with the WHO country office, a series of intensive training courses have been given to a group of doctors and nurses regarding the early identification of danger signs and how to handle them, with a view to reducing morbidity and mortality among the most vulnerable groups such as children and pregnant women. In addition, educational materials in various languages have been produced and disseminated for home carers of children under 5, explaining how to deal with acute and emergency cases during the pandemic. A hotline has been set up to provide women with advice on gynaecological and childbirth-related matters and to reply to women’s questions regarding COVID-19. As of the end of 2020, 610 women had consulted the service.

19. In order to protect children’s health, a monitoring system has continued to be used to report possible cases of polio, diphtheria, tetanus and other infectious diseases. Public health laboratories have continued to collect and test suspect samples, while health centres have been set up to monitor and investigate any new outbreaks of cholera, tuberculosis and other infectious diseases, and to monitor acute respiratory conditions. Vaccines have been supplied to reduce morbidity and mortality among children with a particular vulnerability to such conditions, such as the seasonal influenza vaccine. In addition to this, the Ministry of Health has produced short video clips for children regarding the impact of COVID-19 on mental health during lockdown. Al-Masarra Hospital, which specializes in the treatment of mental illnesses, has launched its “Let’s agree” initiative, which aims to support children’s mental health, suggest stress-management strategies and provide counselling.

20. As a precautionary and preventive measure, the Ministry of Education suspended teaching and provided a number of alternatives to keep schools working and provide educational services safely. In doing so, it took account of changes in the health situation, of local and global educational trends and of the specific educational context in Oman. Most of the options the Ministry chose tended towards integrated education, the importance of vaccinating target groups of children and reducing student density within the classroom. An overarching framework for the operation of schools was set up under Ministerial Decree No. 176/2020. The Decree sought to reflect the changes that had occurred in the 2021/22 school year and included a plan for the operation of schools, working procedures and mechanisms, plans and documents. Its goal was to ensure that all students had access to education. The Ministry has also drawn up a guide to diagnose education loss, which aims to reduce the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on education.

21. The Ministry of Education has made efforts, launched initiatives and projects and developed procedures aimed at integrating information and communications technology into educational processes. In that connection, it has entered into digital agreements and initiatives in partnership with private sector institutions, most notably: an educational content production project, a digital library project, a project for a technical development laboratory, the provision of distance-learning equipment to students, the digitization of curricula and a project to address education loss.

22. The Ministry is carrying out its “Let’s return cautiously to stay safe” campaign which, with the return to school, targets students, teachers, parents and school nurses. The campaign includes messages, educational materials, video clips and lectures, and it has the aim of clarifying the guidelines to be followed to prevent viruses.

23. Since kindergartens for children between the ages of three months and three and a half years had to cease operations, the Ministry of Social Development has implemented programme to reopen these institutions in cooperation with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and with the help of national and international experts. A number of precautionary measures have been put into effect, notably: the drafting of an operational

procedure document for the safe reopening of childcare institutions; the formation of monitoring and assessment teams in all governorates of Oman; and the training of specialists and care providers in those institutions on the practical application of measures intended to protect children from the virus.

24. The Ministry of Social Development suspended all services and rehabilitation programmes in institutions for the protection of persons with disabilities. In May 2020, it also temporarily postponed events and programmes and closed its rehabilitation programmes. The Ministry has begun a study on the social, economic and psychological effects of coronavirus on the families of children with disabilities in Oman, while the Omani Autism Society has also undertaken an academic study on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on persons with autism and their families. A specialized medical team has assessed the health situation inside the unit for the rehabilitation of persons with severe and multiple disabilities, and implemented precautionary measures. Rehabilitation, awareness-raising and follow-up have continued to be delivered remotely to service providers and parents using various social media platforms. An event entitled “Stories of solidarity” was transmitted with the goal of helping persons with disabilities share their difficulties during the pandemic and of providing them with support. Moreover, an online service was launched to provide assistive devices to people at home while the daily pandemic media bulletin was translated into sign language and braille.

25. As concerns the protection of minors such as juvenile offenders, the Ministry of Social Development worked to ensure that juveniles in homes were able to contact their families by telephone and to receive visits, while respecting the precautionary measures in place. No juveniles were detained for violating decrees of the Supreme Commission on COVID-19.

26. Government agencies, civil society institutions and private sector bodies have been making efforts to raise awareness and thereby protect society and children from the psychological repercussions of the pandemic. These efforts have included free telephone lines dispensing advice on physical and mental health as well as direct contact to provide information and health and psychological guidance to persons who had or were suspected of having contracted coronavirus.

27. As a way of encouraging children to express their feelings and of ensuring those opinions were heard, during the pandemic the Ministry of Information published all available news and information via its own audio, visual and online channels, including the “OmanVSCovid19” social media account. A total of 670 audio broadcasts were made in several languages as well as via the use of sign language and braille. In addition, a media campaign was run under the slogan “It is not as it seems” to draw attention to the dangers of the use of modern technology and video games by children. The campaign involved government agencies and the Children First Association. For its part, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth launched a children’s story initiative entitled “Corona among us” to allow youngsters to express their feelings and enable them to be heard.

1 (c) Other information not covered by the replies, and related challenges

28. The administrative apparatus of the State was restructured in 2020, something not mentioned in the common core document referred to in paragraph 3 above.

2. Oman Vision 2040, the five-year plan and the Sustainable Development Goals

29. Oman has been working on its ninth (2016–2020) and tenth (2021–2025) five-year plans, both of which incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals and their indicators. The tenth five-year plan also reflects Oman Vision 2040 in many of its human rights programmes, which also include the rights of the child. The National Centre for Statistics and Information constantly follows up on sustainable development indicators with international organizations, reviews the data concerning Oman on United Nations websites to ensure it is accurate and interacts with relevant organizations with a view to amending national data. A special web portal has been created to meet the country’s obligation to supply data and indicators related to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. It serves as a platform for communication with the parties concerned at home and abroad. Indicators relative to children have also been made available, which point to a positive changes up to 2020.

30. As part of a cooperation programme run jointly with offices of international organizations, including UNICEF, a plan has been developed that includes subprogrammes and projects. One of these is a project for planning and strengthening administrative data systems in Oman with a view to monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals and drafting the relevant reports. Another purpose of the project is to ensure the continuous availability and classification of high-quality administrative data to serve as baselines for Sustainable Development Goal indicators. One significant effort made by the National Centre for Statistics and Information in this regard was the 2014 multiple-indicator cluster survey (MICS5) in Oman, which is an international programme for conducting household surveys and includes information about the health, social and economic situation of children and women. Thanks to the survey, Oman was able to provide a number of Sustainable Development Goal indicators with a bearing on children's rights. The joint national programmes being run by the Government of Oman and UNICEF between 2022 and 2025 have been classified as some of the most advanced in the world, according to the UNICEF country office in the Sultanate.

31. Oman has developed several initiatives to engage children and educate them about the Sustainable Development Goals and children's rights. On 27 May 2019, in cooperation with UNICEF, the Children First Association ran a workshop on the Sustainable Development Goals for children aged between 8 and 14. The workshop, which served to determine the extent to which children are aware of the Goals and to hear their views and suggestions, was part of the process for drafting the first voluntary national report in 2019. It showed that youngsters have a real understanding of the Goals and the role they can play in that connection. The views of young people were also canvassed virtually using social media.

II. Rights under the Convention and the Optional Protocols thereto

A. General measures of implementation

Recommendations of the Committee

32. Reference is made to paragraph 6 of the previous concluding observations, in which the Committee recommended that the State party take all necessary measures to address the recommendations contained in its concluding observations of 2006: the right to identity, corporal punishment, children with disabilities, harmful practices, children of migrant workers, economic exploitation, including child labour, sexual exploitation and trafficking, and the administration of juvenile justice. The Follow-up Committee on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child examined those recommendations and integrated them into the measures taken, including the 2019 implementing regulations of the Children's Code as well as the laws and legislation referred to in the section on legislation.

Reservations

33. The Sultanate of Oman entered seven reservations when, on 9 December 1996, it acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child under Royal Decree No. 54/96 as amended by Royal Decree No. 99/96. In the light of the observations made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding the reservations of Oman to certain articles of the Convention, and acting on the recommendations of a committee formed to propose actionable policies vis-à-vis the country's obligations under the Convention, on 9 January 2011 Oman notified the Secretary-General of the United Nations that it was withdrawing its general reservation and its reservations to articles 7, 9, 21 and 30 of the Convention but not its partial reservation to article 14, which gives children the right to choose their own religion. This was duly enacted under Royal Decree No. 86/2011 concerning the withdrawal of certain reservations to the Convention. In its concluding observations following the January 2016 discussion of the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Oman, the Committee encouraged the State party to consider withdrawing its reservations to article 14 and its general reservation that the Convention is to be applied "within the limits imposed by the material resources available". In that regard, it should be noted that, under Royal Decree No.

86/2011, Oman withdrew all its reservations, with the sole exception of the partial reservation to article 14.

Legislation

34. With reference to paragraph 10 of the concluding observations where the State party is urged to continue to strengthen its efforts to develop consistent legislative frameworks in all areas affecting children's rights in compliance with the Convention, Oman wishes to note that its Children's Code does, in fact, comply with the Convention. Moreover, the implementing regulations set forth the rights contained in the Code in greater detail and also cover areas related to the Convention. Campaigns have been run to raise awareness about the Code and its implementing regulations.

35. In the course of its periodic meetings, the follow-up committee on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child examines legislation affecting children's rights and, working jointly with the National Committee for Family Affairs, makes proposals and recommendations to promote those rights. It should be noted that, during the period 2016–2021, certain laws were updated while other laws and regulations were issued. A list of the legislation concerned is to be found in annex 3.

Comprehensive policy and strategy

36. Reference is made to the recommendation contained in paragraph 12 of the concluding observations regarding the full implementation of the National Strategy for Children and the monitoring and evaluation of progress in the implementation of children's rights. The Ministry of Social Development, in coordination with ministries and other bodies concerned with children's rights, developed the National Strategy for Children 2016–2025. In doing so, the Ministry took account of the ninth (2016–2020) and tenth (2021–2025) five-year plans. The Strategy and the plans cover most of the same areas as the Convention and its Optional Protocols. The follow-up committee on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child uses reports from ministries and other bodies concerned with children's rights to determine the extent to which the National Strategy for Children and its action plan are being implemented, and it works to ensure that they the Strategy is included in the annual plans and programmes of those ministries and bodies.

37. At the same time, a number of other ministries have also developed strategies and plans for the future, such as the Sultanate of Oman Health Vision 2050 and Oman Vision 2040. Furthermore, it should be noted that Oman Vision 2040, social action strategies 2016–2025 and the Health Vision 2050 all contain several strategic directives aimed at achieving the rights of children, women and persons with disabilities, while the social action strategies and the National Strategy for Children have both adopted a human rights-based approach with a view to guaranteeing children's rights. In addition to this, the Sultanate of Oman is constantly seeking to improve its educational system on the basis of its 2017 philosophy of education and its national strategy for education 2040. The main areas of focus of those initiatives include well-administered quality education, the legal and regulatory framework and the link between general education and higher education.

38. The National Strategy for Children, which is being implemented by the relevant bodies, includes comprehensive, time-delineated and measurable goals. The Plan covers the areas of survival, health and well-being; education, development and capacity-building; protection; and participation. The Strategy's action plan contains a number of projects and programmes that also cover protection; early childhood care and development; participation; and rest, play, leisure time and cultural and artistic activities. Thus, the Strategy and its action plan cover most of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.

Coordination

39. Reference is made to the recommendation contained in paragraph 14 of the concluding observations regarding the enhancement of the role and capacity of the National Committee for Family Affairs, and to the question raised in the list of issues concerning the competencies, resources and capacities of that Committee to carry out coordination tasks. Royal Decree No.

12/2007, which enacts the regulations of the National Committee for Family Affairs, sets forth the Committee's mandate in article 2. According to that article, the mandate consists in proposing public policies and programmes for the care of the family, including matters affecting children and women, and monitoring the implementation of such policies and programmes; coordinating the efforts of government agencies and voluntary bodies working in the field of family affairs; promoting studies and research in family related areas; following up on the implementation of decisions and recommendations emerging from international and regional meetings and conferences on family matters, and making its views known on the relevant treaties; cooperating with Arab and international committees and councils and family organizations; proposing and administering financial resources to support family programmes; and adopting decisions and internal regulations regarding its own operations. Article 3 of the Royal Decree defines the budget of the National Committee for Family Affairs, which consists of funds allocated by the State from the general budget and – with the approval of the competent authority – donations, grants and assistance, as well as contributions from local bodies and institutions, and revenues from the Committee's own activities. As per article 2 of the Decree, the National Committee is headed by the Minister for Social Development and its membership is made up of representatives from ministries concerned with family affairs.

40. The follow-up committee on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of its Optional Protocols figures in the combined third and fourth periodic reports as the body responsible for coordinating the efforts of ministries and of civil society vis-à-vis Convention-related projects and programmes. The follow-up committee is also responsible for drafting the periodic reports themselves and for implementing the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. In fact, the two committees enjoy an integrated and constructive relationship. The Oman Human Rights Commission and the steering committee oversee the joint programme between the Government of Oman and UNICEF the aim of which is to coordinate the activities of governmental and non-governmental structures at the local and national levels.

Allocation of resources

41. With reference to the recommendation contained in paragraph 16 of the concluding observations regarding the establishment of a budgeting process that includes a child-rights perspective, attention is drawn to the combined third and fourth periodic reports which mentioned the efforts made by the Ministry of Social Development in coordination with UNICEF in 2010 to introduce child-friendly budgeting. Beginning in 2021, the Ministry of Finance has begun a programme of transformation towards programme and performance budgeting nationwide. Ministries have set up specialized committees to support that transformation and this matter is currently being followed up.

42. Despite the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and low oil revenues, Oman has nonetheless sought to allocate the necessary financial resources to ensure the health and safety of children, thanks to decrees issued by the Supreme Commission, which took due account of the best interests of children and their continuing education, while maintaining precautionary measures. Moreover, children were among the groups targeted for vaccination.

Data collection

43. Reference is made to the recommendation contained in paragraph 18 of the concluding observations where, in the light of its general comment No. 5 (2003) on general measures of implementation of the Convention, the Committee recommends that the State party continue to improve its data-collection system and stipulates that the data collected should cover all areas of the Convention and be duly disaggregated. The National Centre for Statistics and Information – which under Royal Decree No. 15/2022 is currently answerable to the Council of Ministers – collects data, including data on children, under several demographic categories such as age, marital status, disability, gender, nationality, etc. The Centre allows data and indicators to be shared among the ministries concerned and used for the formulation of policies, programmes and projects for the effective implementation of the Convention. The Centre runs field surveys – including the cluster survey mentioned earlier – to collect data on

areas such as child victims of violence. The surveys also include indicators relating to the Sustainable Development Goals that have a bearing on the rights of children and women. In addition to this, the Ministry of Health conducted a national nutritional survey in 2017, which included an evaluation of dietary patterns and of the prevalence of low weight, stunting and malnutrition among children.

44. As concerns the steps taken to ensure that data is collected in a coordinated manner among government agencies, the 2020 census adopted a special mechanism for digitally linking different categories of data, then linking that data to the members of the population with their various socioeconomic characteristics. There exists, in fact, an integrated and interconnected system of national records, which is updated in real time and which is useful when undertaking research or writing national reports. Coordinating with children's rights stakeholders, the National Centre for Statistics and Information draws up periodic and annual reports containing child rights indicators. The reports are then published officially and submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and to the national follow-up committee on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Independent monitoring

45. The combined third and fourth periodic reports mentioned the creation of the National (Omani) Human Rights Commission under Royal Decree No. 124/2008. The Decree defined the Commission's powers and stated that it was to have legal personality and to be independent in the discharge of its functions. The name of the body was changed in 2016, under Royal Decree No. 23/2016, and became the Oman Human Rights Commission. In 2021, under Royal Decree No. 40/2021, the number of representatives from governmental bodies on the Commission was reduced. In this way, the non-governmental members came to account for more than two thirds of the Commission, which is consistent with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles).

46. Reference is made to the recommendation contained in paragraph 20 of the concluding observations where the Committee states that the Human Rights Commission should be able to receive complaints from children, investigate and address those complaints in a child-sensitive manner and ensure the privacy and protection of child victims. In that connection, it should be noted that the Oman Human Rights Commission monitors efforts by national institutions to protect rights in general, and children's rights in particular. It also promotes the mechanisms and procedures for receiving and examining complaints, to which end it makes resources available out of its general budget. Cases involving the violation of children's rights, should any arise, are referred confidentially and as a matter of urgency to the competent authorities for them to make suitable decisions and find appropriate solutions. Acting under its powers, the Commission works to prevent, detect, report and address all abuses and violations that children might suffer. To this end it has a reporting mechanism, citizens and residents of Oman are encouraged to use to report any kind of inappropriate behaviour or exploitation through the Commission's reporting channels; i.e., either appearance in person or via a representative at the offices of the Commission or the submission of a communication via email or the website of the Commission. In the period 2016–2021, a total of 26 reports were received, ranging between civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights, and environmental and development rights.

47. Another of the Commission's activities is to monitor and document issues related to human rights and children's rights that come up in the media. It examines these issues as they arise then submits them to the competent bodies for them to deal with and to find optimal solutions. On the basis of this, awareness-raising plans are then developed that are aimed at all sectors of society. In sum, the Commission plays its role of promoting human rights in general and children's rights in particular in genuine partnership with State institutions.

Dissemination, awareness-raising and training

48. Reference is made to the recommendation contained in paragraph 22 of the concluding observations where the Committee recommends that the State party should continue its efforts to systematically disseminate information about the Convention and its Optional Protocols among all relevant professional groups working with and for children. In this

connection, attention is drawn to efforts already made to disseminate the provisions of international treaties and to raise awareness, provide training and build capacity therein, as well as to efforts to apply child rights principles in all legislative, administrative and judicial procedures. To supplement those efforts, the Ministry of Social Development has signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Higher Judicial Institute regarding training for persons whose work brings them into contact with children as well as for caregivers and all relevant professional groups working with children. Judges, prosecutors, police officers and specialists working in the field of children's rights have all received intensive legal training on human rights treaties regarding women, children and persons with disabilities. The memorandum is to be renewed every three years from 2019.

49. A number of documents supplementing the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Oman have been published. They included the replies of Oman to the list of issues on the combined periodic reports, the concluding observations on the combined periodic reports, the annex to the list of issues and the issues raised by the Committee on the Rights of the Child concerning the national report. The purpose of the publication was to make known the obligations of the Sultanate of Oman vis-à-vis children's rights and, in part, to raise awareness about actions and measures taken in the context of the Convention. In that regard, a video introducing the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been produced. It covers the actions and measures taken, a brief history of the Convention, the chronology of events since the accession of Oman thereto and the steps taken to implement the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child since 2016.

50. Workshops for children are held on a regular annual basis to commemorate World Children's Day and to disseminate an awareness of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Each year during the period 2016–2019, around 800 children participated in activities to mark World Children's Day and this has helped to raise awareness about the Convention and the Children's Code. To mark the global celebrations for the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Ministry of Social Development, in cooperation with partners, launched its Child's Creativity Forum 2019 with the aim of realizing one of the most basic of children's rights: the right to participation and to freedom of opinion and expression. In addition, the Ministry of Social Development runs annual educational programmes for parents on children's rights, while a national campaign has been organized to raise awareness about children's rights in general and their health-related rights in particular. For its part, the Oman Human Rights Commission also runs awareness-raising initiatives on children's rights, such as lectures, training courses, events and publications.

Cooperation with civil society

51. In paragraph 24 of the concluding observations, the Government is urged to cooperate with civil society and human rights defenders. In fact, the Government considers civil society to be one of the most important bulwarks of the State, alongside the governmental sector and the private sector, and it encourages civil society organizations to become active partners in the development process. This approach was embodied in the formulation of Oman Vision 2040, which is the cornerstone of the Government's plans for the future, as working groups were constituted with representatives of civil society, citizens and residents who brought their expertise to bear on the drafting of the Vision. This was consistent with royal directives decreeing that a participatory approach was to be adopted in the formulation of Oman Vision 2040. Thus, government institutions strive to cooperate with civil society in the formulation of legislation and laws that regulate human rights and children's rights. For its part, the Ministry of Social Development encourages and supports the creation of civil society associations involved with children's rights and gives them a seat on national committees such as the follow-up committee on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Such committees, in fact, help to formulate laws and policies such as the Children's Code and its implementing regulations and are involved in planning, programming and conferences. There is no arbitrary detention or harassment of civil society activists in Oman, which remains committed to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

52. As regards the question raised in paragraph 12 of the list of issues concerning steps taken to amend the Non-Governmental Organizations Act, it should be noted that work is

currently under way to update the Act, which was issued pursuant to Royal Decree No. 14/2000. Annex 4 details the programmes implemented by civil society organizations working on children's rights during the years 2016–2021.

53. Under article 37 of the Non-Governmental Organizations Act, the financial resources of such organizations come from members' contributions, donations, gifts, legacies, income from activities, government subsidies and other revenues.

B. Definition of the child

Minimum age for marriage

54. As regards the question raised in paragraph 13 of the list of issues, Oman has taken legislative measures to enforce the minimum age of marriage. In fact, according to article 7 of the Personal Status Act eligibility for marriage requires the partners to be of sound mind and to be at least 18 years of age. In this way, the law firmly and explicitly specifies that the minimum age of marriage in the Sultanate of Oman is 18, and this provision is applicable in all governorates of Oman, without exception. The State has sought to draw attention to this issue with numerous seminars and workshops for Omani families that aim to draw attention to the perils of marriage for girls under the age of 18 and on its impact on their mental and physical health. These initiatives have involved the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Education.

55. As concerns limiting the discretion of judges to authorize the marriage of girls below 18 years of age if it is in their "best interests", it should be noted that girls under the age of 18 in Oman can marry only with the permission of a judge and after it has been established that the marriage would be in their interests. This is enshrined in article 10 (c) of the Personal Status Act, which stipulates: "With due regard to subparagraph (b) of the present article, a person under the age of 18 can marry only with the permission of a judge and after it has been established that the marriage would be in that person's interests." Thus the authority granted to judges to authorize the marriage of girls under the age of 18 is not absolute but dependent upon a verification of the girl's interests. When the evident and verifiable interest of a girl under 18 is best served by her marriage, the judge gives authorization; if such interest is lacking, the judge denies authorization. The concept of best interest – which is one of the prerequisites – refers to everything that would redound to the benefit of the person who is authorized to marry. In addition to this, experts from the Ministry of Social Development examine and pronounce on such cases, in accordance with guidelines issued by the head of the Council of Administrative Affairs of the Judiciary.

C. General principles

Non-discrimination

56. Reference is made to paragraph 14 of the list of issues, to paragraph 25 of the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and to paragraph 26 of those observations where the Committee recommends measures to ensure that all children enjoy equal rights without discrimination. The right of all individuals to live a dignified life is enshrined in article 18 of the Basic Law of State, which reads: "Every person has the right to life and dignity, and the State undertakes to respect and protect those rights, in accordance with the law." Article 21 of the Basic Law stipulates: "All citizens are equal before the law. They have equal public rights and duties, and there is to be no discrimination between them on grounds of sex, origin, colour, language, religion, religious community, domicile or social status." The Basic Law includes specific provision for children, as the social principles set forth in article 15 explicitly underscore the State's obligations vis-à-vis children, persons with disabilities, young persons and infants, in the manner prescribed by the law.

57. Children's rights are also enshrined in current domestic laws, the Children's Code being comprehensive and consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child in such matters as non-discrimination, the principle of a child's best interests, children's right to live and develop, and respect for a child's right to participate (art. 2 (d)). The implementing

regulations of the Code also underscore the need to protect children and ensure their welfare, while other laws also envisage optimal protection for children, such as the Criminal Code, the Cybercrime Act, the Human Trafficking Act, the Drug and Psychotropic Substances Act and the Juvenile Accountability Act.

58. In order to eliminate any form of discrimination against girls, the principles of equality between men and women in all areas and of equality between citizens before the law in rights and duties are both enshrined in the Basic Law of State. According to article 96 of the Basic Law: “Laws, proceedings that have force of law, royal decrees and regulations must all conform to the provisions of the Basic Law of State.” Thus, all laws and legislative and administrative regulations are issued in accordance with the Basic Law, and there is no discrimination between the sexes, be it in the field of training and qualifications or in the conferral of leadership positions and decision-making roles. Indeed, according to article 3 of the Interpretations and General Stipulations Act of 1973: “Words indicating or referring to a masculine are also to be understood to include the feminine just as pronouns that are manifestly or implicitly masculine are likewise to be understood to include the feminine.”

59. Sexual discrimination is prohibited under article 2 (b) of the Children’s Code while the values that constitute the goals of education in Oman are set forth in article 38 of the Code. These include equality among individuals and non-discrimination on grounds of religion, gender, race, etc. The Code also guarantees the right of children to free education in State-run schools up to the post-basic level.

60. Amendments were made to the Omani Passport Act under Royal Decree No. 11/2010, article 12 of which states that women have the right to obtain a passport without requiring the consent of a guardian, whereas previously such consent had been necessary. Likewise, the Social Security Act now extends the right to social security to several of the most vulnerable categories, including orphans.

61. Oman can assert that there is no discrimination against children born to unmarried parents. Their civil rights are guaranteed under the law, including the right to nationality, to birth registration and to a name. In fact, children born out of wedlock are given a normal quadripartite name followed by a tribal name, once the special form for that purpose has been filled out. If the child’s correct descent is then proven, the civil record is adjusted in accordance with article 20 of the Personal Status Act. The Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Health coordinate their efforts with a view to facilitating the access of children to health services, particularly children who do not have identity papers and children of similar status, until such documents can be issued by the competent authority.

62. The social principles articulated in article 15 of the Basic Law set forth the State’s obligation to provide care for persons with disabilities, while article 51 of the Children’s Code stipulates that children with disabilities are to enjoy all their rights without discrimination on grounds of disability. Oman, which ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities under Royal Decree No. 121/2008, has initiated a number of measures to ensure that such persons are able to exercise their rights. In that regard, Royal Decree No. 63/2008 was issued to promulgate the Act on the Care and Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities, which underscores the responsibility of the State to provide protection, care and rehabilitation to such persons, including children. The Act also includes provisions intended to regulate the creation and administration of care centres where persons with disabilities receive rehabilitation and care services. Moreover, legislators have acted to ensure that preventive, therapeutic and rehabilitation educational services are provided in a way that does not discriminate between persons with disabilities and those without. For example, the list of fees for treatment issued under Ministerial Decree No. 55/2009 explicitly stipulates that services are to be made available without discrimination, while the implementing regulations of the Children’s Code also underscore the principle of non-discrimination in the services offered to children with disabilities and, in article 27, it encourages their integration into kindergartens. Such children are, moreover, entitled to social security payments, in accordance with the Social Security Act.

63. The Ministry of Social Development provides a range of rehabilitation services for children with disabilities, beginning at an early age, with a view to enabling them to integrate into school. In that connection, 79 rehabilitation centres have been created: 31 run by the

State, 21 by civil society and 36 by private enterprises. In addition, a number of State and private structures have been set up and furnished. Rehabilitation services are provided to persons with disabilities with the aim of developing their abilities and skills and so helping them to achieve the highest possible level of autonomy and self-reliance. This enables them to integrate into society by attending regular schools or joining the institutional or protected labour market. The services cover a number of different fields such as special education, physiotherapy, behavioural modification programmes, etc.

64. As concerns the children of migrant workers, there are no migrant workers on the territory of Oman, only workers under temporary employment contracts whose children enjoy the same rights as Omani children. This includes the right to register births and to obtain birth certificates. In fact, article 9 of the Children's Code stipulates: "The persons designated under the Civil Status Act are required to report births within Oman and the birth of Omanis abroad to the authorities charged with registering them in accordance with the rules and provisions set forth in the Civil Status Act." Moreover, up to the age of 21, children of resident workers are entitled to a family visa to enable them to can join their parents.

65. As regards education, legislators have acted to ensure fair rights for all children without discrimination. An appropriate and inclusive school environment is provided that takes account of individual differences and needs, and gives children the chance to participate in the various school activities. Educational services are made available to children on an equitable basis and they are able to benefit from all the possibilities and resources within the educational system.

66. The children of resident workers also enjoy full health services. The list of fees for treatment issued under Ministerial Decree No. 55/2009 (art. 4) explicitly envisions that children are to be provided with treatment services. At the same time, children are able to access social services – including social assistance and rehabilitation services as well as clubs, resorts and public parks – without discrimination on the basis of sex or nationality.

Best interests of the child

67. Reference is made to paragraph 28 of the concluding observations, to the Committee's general comment No. 14 (2013) and to paragraph 15 of the list of issues regarding action to ensure that the best interests of the child are a primary consideration when drafting, adopting, reviewing or implementing legislation or policies. In that regard it should be noted that – in accordance with the Basic Law of State and with international treaties ratified by the Sultanate of Oman – national legislation, from the drafting stage, takes due account of children's best interests.

68. Court rulings regarding parental guardianship give supreme importance to the best interests of the child in matters of custody arrangements, in accordance with article 25 of the Children's Code. The Personal Status Act also includes provisions regulating custody arrangements for children. Under the Act, custody is the responsibility of both parents as long as their marriage lasts. The Act states that a custodian must have the ability to raise, maintain and care for the child. If a child has no parents and is not accepted by the party to whom custody would devolve, then a judge must select the person he deems most fit from among the child's relatives or others, in line with article 130 of the Personal Status Act, or choose an institution qualified to look after the child. In the event of the separation of the parents, the law envisages provisions that are rooted in the principle of the best interests of the child.

69. The Personal Status Act further stipulates (art. 60) that the father is responsible for maintaining a female child until such time as she marries and a male child until he reaches an age at which he is able to work, unless he is a student pursuing further education. The Act includes other provisions regulating maintenance, which is given priority over other expenses. Legislators have been careful to ensure that maintenance is duly protected and, in fact, article 280 of the Criminal Code envisages a term of imprisonment of up to 1 year for anyone who fails to pay maintenance after having been the subject of a definitive court ruling ordering such payment.

70. As concerns criminal proceedings, the Code of Criminal Procedure regulates how, in accordance with the best interests of the child, persons under the age of 15 can submit complaints. Article 8 of the Code states: "If a victim of one of the crimes set forth in article

5 (1) of the present Code is under the age of 15 or has a mental disability, the complaint is to be submitted by the party who has responsibility for the victim. If the offence is an offence against property, the complaint can be taken from the guardian or custodian. All relevant complaints procedures are applicable in both cases. If the victim's interests conflict with those of the representative, or if the victim does not have a representative, that role is to be taken by the Office of the Public Prosecution."

71. Criminal cases involving child offenders come under the Juvenile Accountability Act which does not refer to children as "accused persons" but as "juveniles" or "juveniles at risk of delinquency". The Act regulates how criminal proceedings are to be brought, from evidence gathering to the initial investigation, to the concluding investigation and, finally, the judgment. At all these stages priority is accorded to the best interests of the child, in accordance with the Code of Criminal Procedure. In fact, the Code states that persons under the age of 9 cannot be held criminally accountable, while persons between the ages of 9 and 16 who commit a crime or misdemeanour are subject to care measures and cannot be sent to prison. Juveniles facing trial must have a defence lawyer, who is to be engaged by their parents or a third party. If they fail to engage the services of lawyer, one is to be appointed by the court. Trials involving juveniles are to be held in camera and can be attended only by the juvenile's parents, guardians or custodians as well as by lawyers, witnesses, social workers and persons authorized by the court. The juveniles themselves may be exempted from attending and be represented by delegates, in which case the first instance judgment cannot be pronounced until the juvenile concerned has been informed of the proceedings that have taken place. In order to preserve the mental well-being of children and their families, their name and picture cannot be published in the media without the authorization of the court, while sentences handed down against juvenile offenders are not to be set down in a criminal record and cannot be used to determine repeat offences. Juvenile courts cannot hear civil cases and cannot impose fines.

72. One indication of the importance legislators attribute to protecting children and ensuring their interests is the Criminal Code (Act No. 7/2018), which envisions more severe penalties than those contained in the old Criminal Code for crimes in which the victims are under the age of 18. Article 281 envisages penalties for anyone who abducts, conceals or swaps a newborn infant or who falsely claims that the infant is the child of someone other than the real parents. For its part, article 282 penalizes anyone who forcibly removes a minor, even with their consent, from the party responsible for the care of that minor. Article 278 penalizes persons responsible for caring for children under the age of 18 or for persons incapable of looking after themselves due to some physical, psychological or mental condition, and who fail to provide that care or are neglectful in such provision.

73. In addition, the father – and the mother in the absence of the father – is liable to punishment if, while possessing sufficient means, he fails to maintain a child who is unable to earn a living lawfully. Article 287 envisages penalties for persons who supply alcoholic or intoxicating beverages to persons under the age of 18 or who incite them to consume such beverages. The Criminal Code also includes punishments for offences against honour or morals of children. According to article 254, anyone who incites, lures, seduces or assists a person into prostitution or depravity using any means, where such action leads to the commission of a crime, is liable to imprisonment. A sentence of 10 years' imprisonment is to be imposed if the offence is committed using coercion, threats or deceit, if the victim is under the age of 18 or if the perpetrator is an antecedent of the victim, is responsible for the care of the victim or has authority over the victim.

74. Article 257 envisages life imprisonment for anyone who engages in sexual intercourse with a male or female under the age of 15 or with a person suffering a physical or mental disability that would render them incapable of opposing resistance. The same penalty is applicable if the act causes the victim to suffer a chronic sexually transmitted disease or leads to the victim's death, or if the perpetrator is responsible for raising, supervising or caring for the victim, or has authority over the victim. In article 303 of the Code, legislators laid down penalties for women who, to avoid shame, kill a child conceived out of wedlock, and they have increased the penalties for anyone who incites a person under the age of 18 to commit suicide. Article 349 of the Code envisages severe penalties for fraud offences where the

victim is under the age of 18, while article 322 (g) penalizes the offences of false arrest, detention and deprivation of liberty against minors.

75. As concerns actions to ensure children's best interests during the investigation of any violations they might have suffered, such as violence, exploitation or abuse, the Office of the Public Prosecution can, under article 64 of the Children's Code, place such children in temporary care. The children can then be returned to their guardians by decree of the Office of the Public Prosecution, at the recommendation of a child protection delegate, once the reasons for the placement no longer subsist and after the guardian has made a written pledge to care for the child, in accordance with article 65 of the Code.

76. As concerns health care, article 21 of the Children's Code requires guardians to ensure that children undergo the necessary medical tests. As a way of guaranteeing this takes place, a form has been created that testifies that treatment has been completed in another hospital (see annex 5). The form is available in all health institutions for parents or caregivers who, against medical advice, request that a sick child be taken out of hospital. Coordination then takes place with child protection committees to ensure that the child receives health care.

Right to life, survival and development

77. With reference to paragraph 29 of the concluding observations, where the Committee expresses its concern about the number of child victims of traffic accidents, statistics actually point to a drop in deaths and injuries among children in the period between 2013 and 2020. With regard to the recommendation to impose child safety measures, contained in paragraph 30 of the concluding observations and paragraph 16 of the list of issues, attention is drawn to Decree No. 32/2018 issued by the Royal Oman Police to amend certain provisions of the implementing regulations of the Traffic Act. The Decree includes a classification of traffic violations and fines regarding in-vehicle safety procedures: holding children on the lap in a moving vehicle, failure to use a child seat when carrying children under the age of 4, leaving children alone in a vehicle with the ignition key inside and entrusting a vehicle to a driver without a licence.

78. With regard to efforts to strengthen the enforcement of laws with respect to driving licences and appropriate sanctions for driving without a licence and underage driving, article 57 of the Children's Code prohibits the granting of motor vehicle licences to children or enabling them in any way to drive a vehicle. Persons who violate those provisions are liable to the penalties set forth in article 73 of the Code. The State uses school curricula and the media to disseminate a culture of safe road use. Article 49 (1) of the Traffic Act envisages penalties for persons who own, have custody of or are responsible for a vehicle, or in whose name a vehicle is licensed, if they allow the vehicle to be driven by a person who does not possess a licence allowing him to drive that category of vehicle. Article 49 (4) of the Act criminalizes the driving of a vehicle the licence or numberplates of which have been cancelled or withdrawn, or if the driver of the vehicle has had his licence withdrawn or cancelled.

79. As concerns awareness-raising programmes to reduce the number of road accidents, the Royal Oman Police and the Ministry of Education have cooperated with the private sector to draw up a road safety document for use in schools, and the persons responsible for implementing the document have received training at the Road Safety Institute. The Institute also holds annual lectures and workshops for schoolchildren on the safe use of the road. For its part, the Royal Oman Police has set up a traffic school for the purpose of creating a generation of traffic-aware children, while the Shell Road Safety Award is bestowed in schools annually.

80. The Traffic Department has organized several events and programmes to raise awareness among children and parents, using social media, videos, booklets and picture books. The aim is to rectify road-related mistakes such as seating children unsuitably inside a vehicle or crossing roads unsafely.

81. Given that one of the roles of the Office of the Public Prosecution is to raise legal awareness among the public, it has used its official social media accounts to launch an educational programme entitled "Siraj" to disseminate legal texts. Thirteen texts were

published online in 2021, in English and Arabic, concerning traffic regulations and the penalties for their violation.

82. A guide on safe ambulance services for transporting children between health-care institutions has been updated with a view to reducing complications and deaths associated with unsafe transportation. Health workers have been trained and evaluated to become basic trainers in this area. In addition, the Oman Human Rights Commission developed a media package intended to draw attention to the dangers of neglecting road safety, which it launched on Human Rights Day 2018.

83. As a way of motivating civil society to help spread awareness and promote road safety, in 2018 the Oman Road Safety Association signed a memorandum of understanding with various State-run and private companies regarding a nationwide campaign to draw attention to the importance of using child seats in cars. The Association also took part in a number of other initiatives and programmes, including a university and college traffic safety forum in 2019, the “We can drive safely” campaign also in 2019 and the “First-aid on the road” campaign in 2018. In addition to this, Oman participated in the third Road Safety and Traffic Behaviour Conference in Abu Dhabi in 2017 and held a road safety seminar in the governorate of Muscat in 2017.

Respect for the views of the child

84. Reference is made to paragraph 32 of the concluding observations and to paragraph 17 of the list of issues regarding the measures taken to ensure the effective implementation of legislation recognizing the right of the child to be heard in relevant legal proceedings. In this connection it should be noted that respect for freedom of opinion and expression is enshrined in the legislative framework of Oman, as set forth in article 35 of the Basic Law of State. The Children’s Code also safeguards children’s rights to participate, make their views known and express their ideas and choices, and it grants them full opportunity to articulate their opinions using any means they choose (arts. 12 (d) and 12). This is reiterated in article 121 of the implementing regulations of the Code, which requires the child protection committee – in the event of a communication or a complaint – to take due account of the opinion of the child concerned. In line with this principle, measures and steps are taken to ensure the right of the child to be heard during legal proceedings. This is set forth in the Personal Status Act, according to which the competent court is to hear the child’s own views regarding custody arrangements. Legislators have acted to ensure that social workers and court officials also comply with this principle (arts. 4 and 5 of the Juvenile Accountability Act). In the same context, the Public Prosecutor, acting under article 7 of the Juvenile Accountability Act, has issued a decree assigning members of his Office as investigators in cases involving juveniles. The Office of the Public Prosecution questions youngsters in cases in which they are involved, listening to and recording their statements. Moreover, when a report is filed, the Office of the Public Prosecution seeks the assistance of a child protection delegate to examine the child’s social situation. The principle of respect for the views of children has also taken concrete form inside schools with the formation of student administrative councils, class councils and educational activity groups, which propose plans and programmes.

85. Children are also able to make their voices heard by participating in events to mark World Children’s Day (20 November) when they meet ministers and decision makers in constructive dialogue sessions where the youngsters express their views on education, health care, protection, the media and other topics. The Ministry of Information delivers programmes and activities for children via print, audio and visual media. Oman is also eager to involve children in various local, regional and international forums as a way of honing their abilities and gifts. To that end, representatives of Omani children took part in the second session of the Arab Children’s Parliament (31 July 2021) which considered the theme: “The role of children in community peace.”

86. The Ministry of Health is running campaigns for families on healthy villages and cities with the aim of promoting awareness among children about the social problems that concern them and involving them in the search for appropriate solutions. The Ministry has also launched the “Child-friendly home and community” initiative, which sets parameters to

safeguard the survival, development, protection and participation of children in healthy cities and villages.

87. As a way of facilitating and promoting the involvement of children in decision-making processes, the Sultanate of Oman adopted a participatory approach to the drafting of its Vision 2040. All groups within society were involved, including children. They were also involved in reviewing the first voluntary national report in 2019 on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and in discussing the draft of the 2022 combined fifth to sixth periodic reports on the rights of the child.

D. Civil rights and freedoms

Nationality and birth registration

88. Reference is made to paragraph 34 of the concluding observations and to paragraph 18 of the list of issues regarding the right of an Omani woman married to a foreigner to pass on her nationality, and the guarantees surrounding the right to obtain nationality from a mother without discrimination between the two parents on grounds of sex. Oman had previously informed the Committee in this connection, in its reply to the list of issues in relation to its combined third and fourth periodic reports. Under article 10 of the Children's Code, from birth, every child has the right to a nationality and the State guarantees the enjoyment of that right in accordance with the provisions of the Nationality Act, in particular as regards the rights of children vis-à-vis Omani nationality. Article 11 of the Act lays down the rules governing the acquisition of nationality, whereby a child born to an Omani mother and a foreign father can be granted Omani nationality, if the conditions set forth in article 18 of the Nationality Act are fulfilled. Under article 12 of the Act, minors can recover their Omani nationality if their father does so, provided that the law of the State the nationality of which they hold allows them to renounce that nationality. The Act also allows a child to recover Omani nationality even if the father renounced it, in accordance with conditions described in article 13. With regard to the Committee's recommendation to grant Omani women the right to transmit their nationality to their children, on an equal footing with Omani men, the Nationality Act does not admit dual nationality and, if the father does not have a nationality, action is taken in the best interests of the child.

89. As concerns statelessness and the strengthening of efforts to ensure that all births are registered, it should be noted that any child born in the Sultanate of Oman of unknown parents is entitled to Omani nationality under the law (*jus soli*). Moreover, all children have access to social, health, educational and recreational services, without discrimination. Oman adheres to its commitment to combat statelessness, which it puts into effect by embracing the principle of *jus sanguinis* and, in the case of children of unknown father or unknown parents, of *jus soli*. Anyone born to an Omani father automatically acquires Omani nationality. Children born to a foreign father and an Omani mother take the nationality of the father, in order to prevent dual nationality. It should also be noted that Oman remains bound by the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and that there are no stateless children on national territory.

90. With reference to efforts made to ensure that all births are registered, including those of children of residents, as Oman previously informed the Committee in its combined third and fourth periodic reports under the Convention, articles 14, 17 and 20 the Personal Status Act explain how such registration is to take place. Moreover, the majority of births take place in State-run or private health-care institutions where the necessary care is provided without delay or discrimination, and where the births can be registered in the central births and deaths recording system (*Ajmal*). This is a comprehensive national system that provides an online connection between State-run and private health-care institutions and the Civil Status Department of the Royal Oman Police. Thanks to this system, official documents can be obtained easily and promptly.

E. Violence against children

Corporal punishment

91. Reference is made to paragraph 36 (a) of the concluding observations – which invokes general comment No. 8 (2006) on the right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and general comment No. 13 (2011) on the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence – where the Committee calls on the State party to amend the Children’s Code to explicitly prohibit corporal punishment in all settings; to repeal article 38 (2) of the Criminal Code (article 44 (a) in the amended version), which authorizes punishment within the limits of established customs; and to implement policies to ensure that corporal punishment is prohibited in all settings. Reference is also made to paragraph 19 of the list of issues, which also concerns corporal punishment. As regards the recommendation to amend the Children’s Code to explicitly prohibit and criminalize corporal punishment, such prohibition is already effectively envisioned in the Code, which defines violence in the following terms: “The deliberate use of force or of physical strength by an individual or group against a child, or the threat of use, such as would cause actual or potential harm.” The Code also defines ill-treatment as: “The deliberate and direct practice of physical, mental or sexual torture or abuse against a child, or neglect on the part of the guardian in a manner that gives rise to conditions that would hinder the child’s physical, mental or social development.” Article 56 of the Code explicitly prohibits any form of violence against children, including corporal punishment. According to the Code, anyone who uses violence against a child is liable to a term of imprisonment of between 5 and 15 years and to a fine of between 5,000 and 10,000 Omani rials (RO). Article 44 (a) of the Criminal Code does not admit the use of violence against children, but it does allow parents to use limited correctional discipline. This can in no way constitute an assault against the child concerned as the Children’s Code prohibits violence against children and article 44 is to be interpreted in the light of that Code.

92. Reference is made to paragraph 36 (b) and (c) of the concluding observations regarding the promotion of positive, non-violent and participatory forms of child-rearing and the strengthening and expansion of efforts to inform the general public, through awareness-raising programmes including campaigns, about the negative impact of corporal punishment on children. In that connection, the Ministry of Social Development has implemented a number of programmes, including 368 programmes on child-raising, attended by 24,308 participants, and 50 programmes on positive child education, attended by 24,155 participants. For its part, the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs has also launched a number of awareness-raising initiatives, notably via Friday sermons. Furthermore, the Ministry of Social Development has set up the “My protection” website, which acts as a platform from which to present child-related topics in general and, in particular, ways to protect children from various forms of ill-treatment. The website enables users to learn about the social dimensions of family abuse and it explains the care, protection and rehabilitation services offered by the Family Protection Department to children in the “Dar al-Wifaq” temporary care facility. It also identifies other forms of ill-treatment that are dealt with by child protection committees in the governorates.

93. With reference to paragraph 19 of the list of issues about the implementation of a national strategy for preventing and mitigating the maltreatment of children in Oman, numerous initiatives could be cited. They include the strengthening of the mechanism for reporting cases of abuse within the health-care system using an online reporting form; ongoing training programmes for health workers on how to deal with cases of child abuse reported by health-care institutions; coordination and follow-up with child protection committees to create child-protection mechanisms and monitor child victims of violence; and the integration of the educational aspects of the National Strategy for the Prevention of Child Abuse into a communication strategy for behavioural change. The overall purpose is to consolidate the efforts to deal with such cases being made by different groups such as parents and teachers.

94. The Oman Human Rights Commission has delivered 66 lectures for school students to inform them of their right to report any kind of ill-treatment. In addition, a series of booklets entitled “My childhood is my right” has been published to raise community

awareness on issues related to children's rights, most notably the effects of corporal punishment on children.

Abuse and neglect

95. Reference is made to paragraph 37 of the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which invokes general comment No. 13 (2011) on the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence and notes target 2 of Sustainable Development Goal 16 to end abuse and exploitation against children. Reference is also made to paragraph 38 (a) and (b) of the concluding observations, which recommends further strengthening of awareness-raising and education programmes, formulating a comprehensive strategy to prevent child abuse and establishing a mechanism that enables children to report cases of abuse and offers victims the necessary protection. In that context, the Ministry of Social Development is implementing a social work strategy that contains a number of goals and outcomes which the Ministry will strive to achieve in the coming years. The strategy improves child protection by consolidating the available services. It also envisages the development of fair, family-oriented policies, legislation and programmes, which are based on indicators and which aim to uphold the stability and cohesion of families. In addition, the strategy considers integrated early childhood development to be a national priority, underpinned by government commitment, resource allocation, institutional capabilities and intersectoral coordination mechanisms. Under Ministerial Decree No. 43/2016, child protection delegates have been appointed in all the country's governorates with the task of applying the Children's Code and its implementing regulations. In pursuit of this goal, their mandate allows them to receive complaints and reports of child rights violations, such as violence, ill-treatment or exploitation of children; to take action to protect children; to draw up tailored intervention plans with the aim of protecting children and rehabilitating and reintegrating them into society, in coordination with specialists; and to report cases to child protection committees. The Ministry of Education has also drawn up a guide for schools on how to protect students from abuse.

96. The child protection hotline 1100 was launched in January 2017 as a free round-the-clock service which receives reports from children themselves, from their representatives or from third parties. Its purpose is to protect children from all forms of violence, abuse or neglect, to provide urgent services and to help monitor cases of child abuse by studying its causes and examining ways to treat it and to prevent its recurrence.

97. Paragraph 38 (c) of the concluding observations recommends facilitating the physical and psychological rehabilitation of child victims and ensuring that they have access to health services, including mental health services. To that end, a team was set up within the Ministry of Health to monitor cases involving child victims of violence in hospitals across the governorates. The team discusses reported cases, develops appropriate treatment plans then has the cases followed up by psychiatrists, social workers and paediatricians. It also coordinates with the competent authorities to protect the children concerned.

98. Children who have suffered any form of abuse or neglect are placed in the "Dar al-Wifaq" temporary care facility, at the recommendation of a child protection delegate and by decree of the Office of the Public Prosecution. Children in the facility benefit from multiple services including care, rehabilitation and legal assistance, as well as reintegration once their families have been rehabilitated.

99. Regarding the recommendation in paragraph 38 (d) of the concluding observations to the effect that professionals and staff should be provided with training on ways to prevent and monitor child abuse and neglect, the Ministry of Social Development has run several training programmes for members of child protection committees and specialists from all sectors. The training – which was carried out with the involvement of international experts – sought to improve participants' familiarity with the most significant methods and skills for enhancing child protection, conducting reporting procedures, monitoring suspected abuse and implementing operational measures. In addition, training programmes on effective interviewing skills have taken place, along with a series of lectures on the Children's Code and child protection mechanisms. The Ministry of Education has also run a number of training programmes for specialists, including one entitled "Strategies and methods for

monitoring student behaviour”, another called “Developing psychological skills” and lastly “Professional methods for dealing with harassment and bullying”.

100. In 2021, the National Committee for Family Affairs ran a training programme on how to conduct crime-related interviews with children, aimed at specialists who work with abused children from the Council of Administrative Affairs of the Judiciary, the Royal Oman Police, the Office of the Public Prosecution, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Education. The programme aimed to improve their professional competencies regarding child interview protocols, including those in criminal settings, and comprehensive approaches for detecting all types of abuse.

101. In coordination with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health has run a series of workshops for health-service providers in schools, training them in the early detection of behavioural and social signs that might indicate a child is suffering psychological difficulties. This helps the health-service providers to manage cases and to refer them to specialists. A mental health guide was produced in 2020, aimed at helping school nurses support the mental health of students, develop students’ skills in adapting to and meeting life challenges and identifying and handling cases of abuse.

102. As concerns the recommendation in paragraph 38 (e) of the concluding observations regarding the allocation of adequate human, technical and financial resources to the Family Protection Department, it should be noted that the human resources of the Department have been reinforced with the appointment of a group of specialists. The estimated budget to cover the annual expenses of the Family Protection Department between 2016 and 2021 was as follows:

Info	Year					
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total amount spent in dollars	939 324.82	1 065 941.71	1 146 735.35	1 134 676.60	1 149 147.10	1 163 617.61

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The budget includes operational expenses, standing advance payments, annual development plans, staff salaries and the needs of residents of the “Dar al-Wifaq” facility.

103. Reference is made to paragraph 38 (f) of the concluding observations which concerns community-based programmes aimed at preventing and addressing domestic violence and child abuse and neglect. In this connection, the Ministry of Social Development has gathered a team of child protection trainers who operate in the various governorates of the country to train and educate members of the community about child abuse and protection mechanisms. The training is aimed particularly at persons who work with children in schools, health centres and civil society associations. Human Rights Day, which falls annually on 10 December, is celebrated nationally and the Oman Human Rights Commission chose to focus the 2018 edition on children’s rights, raising awareness about the neglect and abuse of children. That year the Commission produced four educational films, aimed at parents and addressing the issue of child neglect.

104. The Family Protection Department and the Family Counselling Department are also running community-based child protection programmes that target parents, carers and specialists. Civil society institutions, such as Omani women’s associations, have been involved as both recipients and implementers of the initiative, which includes programmes that range from the preventive to the therapeutic in addition to awareness-raising and training. It should be noted, moreover, that the Ministry coordinates with volunteers to run programmes and activities to help child victims of violence and abuse who are being housed in the temporary care facility.

105. Paragraph 38 (g) of the concluding observations refers to the provision of information on investigations, follow-up, recovery and social reintegration. Social welfare and protection are one of the most important remits of the Ministry of Social Development. In that connection, the Family Protection Department focuses considerable efforts on groups that

lack care, protection and rehabilitation, irrespective of their age, sex or social status. Children are one of the main target groups because the Ministry believes that they are in special need of care and protection as well as of rapid and direct intervention in circumstances where their physical, mental or social development is being affected. Actions can take various forms, depending upon requirements.

106. Under article 20 of the implementing regulations of the Children's Code, child protection committees have several measures at their disposal to provide protection and care for children suffering, violence, exploitation, ill-treatment or neglect. Such children can be placed in the "Dar al-Wifaq" facility if they have no other safe place to go. There they receive the support they need in the form of an integrated programme of social, health and educational care. They also receive psychological support via appropriate rehabilitation and treatment plans as well as legal assistance with procedures related to the progress of the cases in which they are involved, as well as explanations and answers to their questions.

107. In addition to this, the Childcare Centre takes in children who have been deprived of family care or whose families have irreparably disintegrated and who have no relatives to look after them. Such children receive comprehensive care that covers all aspects of their lives. Care and protection procedures can be carried out in parallel with efforts to reintegrate the children into their families and to provide those families with material and moral assistance. Parents and carers receive guidance and counselling on sound child-rearing methodologies, on the conduct of relations inside and outside the family and on facilities for accessing services.

108. In general, specialized training is provided continually to specialists who deal with such cases, be they law enforcement officials, health-care workers, teachers and educators or providers of care services and social support services. The training fundamentally focuses on combating violence in all its forms. In addition, victims of violence and exploitation receive training on the basics of self-defence, interpersonal relationships and access to services.

Sexual exploitation and abuse

109. Reference is made to paragraph 40 (a) and (b) of the concluding observations and to paragraph 20 of the list of issues where the Committee requests information about steps taken to establish mechanisms, procedures and guidelines to ensure mandatory reporting of cases of sexual abuse and exploitation of children. It should be noted that mandatory reporting is envisaged in the Children's Code, article 62 of which states that every person has the right to report any incident that constitutes violence, exploitation, abuse or violation against the rights of a child. Article 63 requires doctors, teachers and anyone else who by virtue of their profession learns of an act of violence, exploitation, abuse or violation against the rights of a child, to inform the child correction committees. There is cooperation between the Royal Oman Police and the Office of the Public Prosecution regarding the roll-out of mechanisms to handle and refer such cases promptly so as to ensure a forensic examination and guarantee the rights of abused children.

110. Workers in health institutions who find themselves dealing with cases of child abuse follow an operational manual, and Omani trainers have toured the governorates giving workshops and lectures on how to handle such cases. Teams to monitor children who have suffered violence have been formed in all provincial hospitals; they discuss reported cases and formulate treatment plans in coordination with the relevant bodies to provide, if necessary, protection and rehabilitation. Cases of sexual abuse against children are also handled by health-care institutions in line with standard protocols whereby the necessary care is provided before reporting the matter to the child protection committees, as stipulated in the Children's Code.

111. As concerns paragraph 40 (c) of the concluding observations regarding awareness-raising and education programmes to combat the stigmatization of child victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, the Ministry of Social Development cooperates with partners on educational initiatives and programmes, which are put into effect by a national team of child protection trainers. This includes a programme to provide psychological support to health-service providers in schools, training them in a tool for the early detection of behavioural and social signs that might indicate a child is suffering psychological difficulties. This helps the

health-service providers to manage cases and to refer them to specialists. A mental health guide was produced in 2020, aimed at helping school nurses support the psychological health of students, develop students' skills in adapting to and meeting life challenges and identifying and handling cases of abuse.

112. In order to increase the effectiveness of health-care workers, they have been provided with training in the basics of forensic medicine to help them deal optimally with cases of abuse. Many health-care professionals have participated in a training programme on how to conduct crime-related interviews with children, while a number of academic gatherings have been held to discuss the dangers of child abuse. One of these – a forum entitled “Our children are in our trust” held with the involvement of experts from Oman and abroad – had the purpose of educating and guiding members of the community and training the relevant officials.

113. Programmes to raise awareness among children and the community in general to sexual assault include the “Three steps” initiative, which is run by Al-Masarra Hospital with age-suitable workshops to teach children between 6 and 10 how to protect themselves. Workshops have also been held for school students as well as training programmes via audio and visual social media for society at large. Lectures have been given to parents and guardians to raise awareness among families about the dangers of child abuse and how to recognize behaviours that might suggest a child is being harassed. Other subjects covered include how to deal positively with juveniles and the effect of smart devices on children and the legal implications thereof. In addition, school students have received lectures on sexual harassment.

114. As concerns paragraph 40 (d) of the concluding observations regarding the development of programmes and policies for the prevention, recovery and social reintegration of child victims, the Ministry of Social Development works side by side with other agencies and institutions that provide services to children at risk of abuse, helping them to realize their potential and developing policies and programmes to guarantee respect for the right to privacy and confidentiality when cases involving child victims of sexual violation and exploitation are being considered. For its part, the “Dar al-Wifaq” facility provides care and psychological support to the children and their families and follows treatment programmes and rehabilitation plans that help to integrate the child victim back into society.

Harmful practices

115. With reference to paragraph 42 (a) and (b) of the concluding observations and to paragraph 21 of the list of issues, it should be noted that harmful practices are not a phenomenon in Oman. Nonetheless, in order to address any shortcomings, legislators have developed legal provisions criminalizing such practices. For example, article 20 of the Children's Code states: “All persons – in particular doctors, nurses and guardians – are forbidden from undertaking, promoting or assisting in any traditional practices harmful to the health of a child.” Under article 67 of the Code, anyone violating those provisions is liable to a term of imprisonment of between 6 months and 3 years. Article 4 of the implementing regulations of the Children's Code identifies traditional practices harmful to children, including female genital mutilation or branding, which cause mutilations or adversely affect children's health. If any such practices are reported, they are examined via the national system for reporting abuse against children under the age of 18.

116. Acting on those provisions, the Ministry of Health has imposed a complete ban on such practices. It has also made awareness-raising about harmful traditional practices part of its training programmes for health educators and health support groups, who are the point of contact with the carious sectors of society. Programmes have also been run to raise the health awareness of school students and to give them the skills they require to follow healthy lifestyles; in particular, modules on reproductive health have been introduced into parts I and II of the facts of life textbook, aimed at adolescent schoolgirls. School nurses also help to provide health services and training in the identification, monitoring and reporting of child abuse.

117. As concerns paragraph 42 (c) of the concluding observations regarding comprehensive awareness-raising programmes on the negative consequences of child marriage for girls, the Ministry of Health has included harmful traditional practices

(including child marriage) as part of the training programmes for health educators and health support groups mentioned in paragraph 116. The issue of child marriage also features in health guides for adolescents in schools and in a guide for parents on adolescent health. For its part, the Ministry of Education has issued a series of booklets under the title “My positive character” which aim to teach students various child-related concepts, skills and capacities in several areas. In addition, there is a series of peer-to-peer educational guides for boys and girls that focus on the life skills necessary to deal with certain harmful practices, as well as a guide for peer-to-peer trainers. Parents’ councils, counselling lessons and panel discussions are held to make female students and society in general aware of the legal age of marriage. At the same time, awareness-raising campaigns aimed at families and parents aim to involve students and society as a whole in combating such behaviours.

118. Paragraph 42 (d) of the concluding observations concerns the establishment of appropriate redress mechanisms accessible to all girls and women who are victims of harmful practices. Such mechanisms do exist and victims can have recourse thereto to obtain their full rights and ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted and adequately punished. One of these mechanisms is that of filing a complaint against an offender with the Royal Oman Police or the Office of the Public Prosecution; another is that of recourse to the Oman Human Rights Commission where an individual complaint can be filed using the reporting mechanisms; yet another is that of contacting the child protection hotline.

119. With reference to paragraph 42 (d) of the concluding observations regarding the strengthening of support measures, the Family Protection Department of the Ministry of Social Development protects and cares for all children who suffer abuse. First, it receives reports and complaints of any kind of violation against children’s rights, including harmful practices. Then it intervenes and takes the necessary measures in coordination with the health, judicial and educational authorities, depending upon the requirements of the case. Lastly, it provides treatment and rehabilitation. If necessary, the child concerned can be placed in a temporary care facility. It should be noted, moreover, that child-protection training programmes are run for specialists in health, social, judicial, educational and other institutions.

F. Family environment and alternative care

Children deprived of a family environment

120. Reference is made to paragraph 44 (a) of the concluding observations concerning the recommendation to adopt policies and measures for changing mind-sets and stereotypes regarding the roles of parents, so as to encourage equality. The role of the family and the guardian’s duty to care for a child are described in the Children’s Code. Children have the right to survive, grow and develop in the bosom of a compact and united family, and the State is to use every available means to ensure they are able to enjoy that right (art. 25 of the Code). Likewise, children have the right to survive, grow and develop in a context of freedom and human dignity, which it is the responsibility of the guardian to provide. The State works to ensure that guardians fulfil their obligations by providing the necessary assistance, by promoting institutions and facilities and by delivering childcare and development services. According to article 28 of the Code: “Children have the right to an adequate standard of living that meets their physical, mental, psychological and social development needs. It is the responsibility of the parents or the guardian (depending upon the case) to provide that standard of living within the limits of their resources and abilities. The State is to ensure that parents or guardians fulfil their obligation to support their children by collecting child maintenance from them, where necessary, in accordance with the provisions of the Personal Status Act and by providing support programmes and financial assistance.” The parents’ duty to ensure the survival, growth and development of their offspring subsists even after the breakup of the marriage, as set forth in the Personal Status Act.

121. The Ministry of Social Development – believing as it does that the family plays a vital role in the cohesion and development of communities – has rolled out a number of programmes and activities for families and care providers in general, and for children in particular. These include guides on developmental, preventive and therapeutic issues

associated with childrearing methods, techniques and strategies. Most of the programmes focus strongly on the importance of the emotional fulfilment and sound upbringing of children.

122. Reference is made to the passage concerning the family environment in the combined third and fourth periodic reports and to paragraph 44 (b), (c) and (d) of the concluding observations wherein the State is recommended to amend the Civil Status Act and other relevant legislation, specifically with respect to marriage, divorce, property, inheritance, nationality, guardianship and custodial rights, to ensure that men and women, and boys and girls, have equal rights and responsibilities. In that connection, article 2 of the Basic Law of State stipulates: "The religion of the State is Islam and Islamic sharia is the foundation of legislation." These questions had been integrated into the Personal Status Act and the courts and the law enforcement authorities are working to implement them.

123. Reference is made to paragraph 46 (a) of the concluding observations and to paragraph 22 (a) of the list of issues regarding the need to support and facilitate family-based care wherever possible. In fact, the implementing regulations of the Children's Code do support and facilitate family-based care for children. In that connection, the requirements for families applying for foster placement have been amended as have other procedures that contribute to providing a family environment for children and thus achieving their best interests. The relevant provisions are contained in section IV of the regulations which focuses on the development and improvement of family-based care and the encouragement of foster placement. A foster placement committee, which was set up under Ministerial Decree No. 43/2021, brings together a number of specialists whose task it is to study foster applications, interview families, review cases involving children deprived of family care and examine the challenges they face.

124. Paragraph 46 (b) of the concluding observations and paragraph 22 (b) of the list of issues concern adequate safeguards appropriate to the needs of the child. In that context, the Ministry of Social Development seeks to provide family stability for children and, in fact, placement in a care home is a decision of last resort, with legal guardianship being obtained by the courts to protect the rights of the child. In addition, financial guarantees are provided to young persons and foster families. Children in foster care are periodically visited by specialists who work in coordination with other bodies. Furthermore, under Ministerial Decree No. 51/2021, the Ministry of Social Development has set up a team to invest the assets of children deprived of family care. The team works in partnership with the General Directorate of Courts, the Council of Administrative Affairs of the Judiciary and the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs.

125. The Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs launched a safe investment initiative in 2021, one of a series of initiatives rolled out by the Ministry to raise awareness about the importance of safeguarding the funds of orphans and minors in order to secure their future and encourage community solidarity.

126. As concerns paragraph 46 (c) of the concluding observations and paragraph 22 (c) of the list of issues regarding periodic reviews of the placement of children in foster care, the Ministry of Social Development does in fact carry out periodic field visits to follow up on children in foster families. It also submits reports on the stability of the children's situation and runs treatment programmes to address any challenges. If the children are suffering any kind of abuse, they are withdrawn from the family and placed in a care institution in their own best interests.

127. The reporting and monitoring of the maltreatment of children takes place through available channels such as special telephone lines for foster families, the 1100 child protection hotline and the existing reporting mechanisms of the Oman Human Rights Commission.

128. As regards paragraph 46 (d) of the concluding observations, which concerns the allocation of adequate human, technical and financial resources to alternative care centres, the Ministry of Social Development is responsible for meeting the living costs of children placed in the institutions it runs. This includes all health, educational, psychological and recreational activities as well as special rehabilitation programmes for different groups. To this end, the Ministry approves annual plans that cover all aspects of the children's lives, and

it appoints specialists to work in the centres. Civil society associations also provide support for the childcare programmes. The centres choose their staff very carefully via interviews, tests and training in various psychosocial and professional fields.

129. Reference is made to paragraph 46 (e) of the concluding observations on the provision of aftercare support for children ageing out of the alternative care system. Once the children leave care institutions they are placed in youth integration homes where they are fully provided for; they receive assistance, are helped to enrol in higher education and are provided with scholarships, in partnership with government agencies and with support from civil society and academic institutions. Efforts are also made to qualify them to join the labour market and they are given access to residential lands and to social housing, as well as receiving support in other fields.

G. Children with disabilities

130. Reference is made to paragraph 48 (a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f) of the concluding observations which concerns setting up a comprehensive strategy for the inclusion of children with disabilities; adopting a national plan for the care of children with disabilities; ensuring the possibility of their enrolment in school; increasing the number of schools, residential facilities and care and rehabilitation centres for children with disabilities, especially in rural areas; ensuring that continuous training is provided for professionals working with children with disabilities; undertaking sustained public awareness campaigns; and taking all measures necessary to ensure that children with disabilities are fully integrated into all areas of social life. In that connection, the Sultanate of Oman has made the rights of persons with disabilities one of the key themes of its social action strategies 2016–2025. The relevant programmes focus on the development of legislation and monitoring mechanisms that are consistent with the Basic Law of State and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This includes rehabilitation programmes; comprehensive, accessible and high-quality support services within an accessible and barrier-free environment; the provision of psychosocial support, counselling and early intervention services; economic empowerment for persons with disabilities on the labour market; and support for public services and facilities that are more accessible to persons with disabilities of both sexes, with active community participation. Children with disabilities also have the right to education in public and private educational institutions and in special schools such as the Fikriya School, the Omar ibn al-Khattab Institute for the Blind and the Amal School for the Deaf.

131. As for increasing the number of rehabilitation centres for children with disabilities, there has been an expansion across all the governorates of Oman and the total number of State-run, charitable and private centres currently stands at 79. This has led to a consequent increase in the number of users which, as of the end of 2021, stood at 5,276. The centres offer comprehensive rehabilitation programmes and assistance services in addition to medical rehabilitation and treatment programmes which use the most up-to-date therapeutical devices. Specialized units offer physiotherapy for particular neurological conditions, rehabilitative respiratory care and paediatric care. Some centres have expanded their capacity to admit cases in the evenings in outpatient clinics, while medical rehabilitation departments are now offering a prosthetics service.

132. The Sultanate of Oman provides high-quality services to ensure that students with disabilities can integrate into private and State-run schools in all the country's governorates. These services include educational, mental and auditory integration programmes; a learning difficulties programme, a speech and communication programme; a global integration programme for children on the autism spectrum; and diagnostic services. In addition, under Ministerial Decree No. 49/2020 issued by the Ministry of Education, a twelfth-grade certificate has been adopted for students in special education (those who do not meet the requirements for the general education diploma). At the institutional level, a general directorate for special education and continuous learning has been set up under Ministerial Decree No. 98/2021, with the aim of improving educational services for children with disabilities.

133. As concerns continuous training for professionals working with children with disabilities, training guides for health workers have been issued and special clinics for persons with Down syndrome have been set up in primary health-care institutions. Cases are referred to secondary and tertiary health-care institutions, as necessary. Two hundred and sixty-two health-care professionals had completed training in the basics of sign language by the end of 2021, and an initiative has been launched wherein expert trainers provide formation to medical rehabilitation specialists, in cooperation with the Oman Physical Therapy Association. A vocational development programme is organized on an annual basis to improve the skills of persons working with persons with disabilities in all State-run, charitable and private centres. In addition, institutions of higher education offer specialized programmes such as a diploma on special education.

134. In the field of education, persons involved in the provision of vocational development programmes for children with disabilities have been offered skills-improvement in line with the latest local and regional advances. A number of courses and programmes have been held, most notably the sixteenth intensive training course to qualify new teachers to work in special schools (2021), a training programme to improve the effectiveness of supervisors and administrators of special schools (2021) and a training course for new teachers in the area of special education.

135. With reference to the full integration of children with disabilities into all areas of social life, persons with disabilities are provided with habilitative services from an early age as a way of facilitating their integration into schools and their involvement in sports and leisure activities. Moreover, there is an ongoing programme to build and outfit State-run and private structures and facilities that provide rehabilitation for persons with disabilities. The aim is to develop the abilities and skills of such persons, helping them achieve the highest possible level of independence and self-reliance and thus enabling them to integrate into society, enrol in schools or join the institutional or protected labour market. According to their particular needs, some children with disabilities have received social security payments and assistive devices.

136. Institutions have also promoted the involvement and integration of children with disabilities in competitions of various kinds, wherein some of them have managed to achieve leading positions. These include, for example, a package of training programmes targeting students with disabilities in cooperation with private sector institutions; special competitions for students with disabilities; a sports fair for persons with disabilities; and a national campaign on the optimal use of communications media in special schools.

137. In cooperation with the Health Board of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), UNICEF and the King Salman Centre for Disability Research, the Sultanate of Oman organized the first Gulf Conference on Autism Spectrum Disorders the aim of which was to foreground scientific evidence and to improve awareness in society with a view to providing integrated and sustainable care for children with autism. Oman participates in a number of annual international events on persons with disabilities, again for the purpose of raising awareness about this category of persons. It also broadcasts programmes and disseminates educational materials via various media and social media channels.

H. Basic health and welfare

Health and health services

138. Reference is made to paragraph 50 (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f) and (g) of the concluding observations and to general comment No. 15 (2013) on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health. In connection with the recommendation to make available adequate financial and human resources to the health sector in order to ensure the quality of services for all children across the board, it should be noted that universal health coverage increased from 71.9 per cent in 2016 to 74 per cent in 2020. This is a 16-factor composite indicator which translates into 4 principle elements: maternity and child health programmes, a communicable diseases programme, a non-communicable diseases programme and accessibility to health services. The Ministry of Health strives to improve the optimal distribution of health services by applying several key directives: quality, justice,

efficiency, a national trend towards service decentralization, raising the level and increasing the number of health-care institutions, improving quality of life, making health a national priority, a national trend towards investment, a search for alternative funding and private-sector partnership.

139. As concerns the quality of health services provided to children – including all aspects of care (promotion, prevention, cure and rehabilitation) delivered via a network of primary health-care institutions supporting hospitals that provide secondary and tertiary care – in 2021, there were 263 health-care institutions as compared to 255 in 2016, an increase of 2.7 per cent. Primary health-care institutions constitute the access point for health care and for basic health services for mother and child, including periodic visits for children for vaccination against communicable diseases. The Government has been at pains to establish a primary health-care centre for every 10,000 inhabitants and is moving towards establishing such centres for every 500 to 1,000 inhabitants in order to reach all residents in all governorates.

140. With reference to paragraph 50 (b) of the concluding observations and to paragraph 24 (b) of the list of issues, the Ministry of Health is taking steps to address the causes of diarrhoea, including the periodic updating of therapeutic and preventive integrated health standards for children under the age of 5, and it is developing a teaching plan for students at the faculty of medicine Sultan Qaboos University and at faculties of nursing. Diarrhoea is being treated in health centres with the use of zinc syrup, and there is a move towards introducing a rotavirus vaccination as part of the child inoculation programme. Moreover, caregivers are being made aware of the issue of diarrhoea including methods for its prevention and treatment and how to care for affected children at home.

141. Reference is made to paragraph 50 (c) of the concluding observations and to paragraph 24 (b) of the list of issues, which concern interventions to prevent anaemia and the stunting, wasting and undernourishment of children. In that connection, all pregnant women undergo haemoglobin screening as soon as their pregnancy is confirmed and they are provided with folic acid and iron supplements. In fact, anaemia in pregnant women decreased from 60.5 per cent in 2009 to 29.3 per cent in 2017. Haemoglobin screening is carried out on children aged between 9 and 18 months for the early detection and treatment of anaemia. Seventh-grade schoolgirls undergo comprehensive epidemiological and anthropometric screening and, if any cases of malnutrition are discovered, haemoglobin tests are conducted, nutritional guidelines and iron tablets are dispensed and recovery is duly monitored. It should be noted that – with the publication of the results of the 2009 nutritional survey which showed an anaemia rate of 60.6 per cent in children under 5 – the policy of fortifying flour was revised in 2010 and the percentage of iron was increased to 60 units per million. As a consequence, the anaemia rate in preschool children improved, falling to 23.8 per cent according to the results of the 2017 nutritional survey. Moreover, as a result of fortifying flour with folic acid, spina bifida fell from 4.03 cases per 1,000 births in 1995 to 0.27 cases per 1,000 births in 2017.

142. With a view to improving nutrition overall, a nutritional survey was conducted in 2017, which focused on anaemia and on stunting, wasting and undernourishment affecting children and women of childbearing age. The results of the survey showed that 11.4 per cent of children under 5 suffered from stunting and 9.3 per cent from wasting. In order to determine the causes of malnutrition, a study was carried out in 2019, the first of its kind in Oman, to identify the factors behind three health problems that had been revealed by the survey: the low rate of exclusive breastfeeding, the low number of feeds given to infants and the high rate of anaemia in pregnant women. The study identified the obstacles to exclusive breastfeeding in the fact that breastfeeding mothers work, that the mothers feel they do not have enough milk for their offspring and that they fear they might harm their child by poor feeding. It also showed that malnutrition can be caused by mothers no longer providing complementary foods when their children are ill and are not accepting food. The study has helped to identify the need to increase the duration of maternity leave so as to empower mothers in their role and enable them to exclusively breastfeed their offspring. It also pointed to the need to create a supportive environment for breastfeeding in the workplace and public places. In addition to this, the baby-friendly hospital initiative was relaunched in April 2021 in all public and private health institutions, with training being provided at the central level and the designation of superintendents in all the governorates.

143. As concerns paragraph 50 (d) of the concluding observations and paragraph 24 (c) of the list of issues regarding care and nutrition for mothers, it should be noted that in order to bring comprehensive health services close to the people who need them – in particular antenatal and postnatal care, and reproductive health services in general – those services are provided as part of primary health care. Health centres in remote villages have been supplied with maternity beds, 54 by the end of 2019, and obstetric services in the centres are provided by trained doctors and midwives. It is worth mentioning that reproductive health services, particularly antenatal and postnatal care, come under a national programme to guarantee service quality, and women in all governorates have access to the same services. Secondary care is provided via hospitals, while cases that call for particular specializations are referred for tertiary care in the governorate of Muscat. The costs of transferring such patients from distant governorates are borne by the State.

144. As concerns paragraph 50 (e) of the concluding observations and paragraph 24 (c) of the list of issues regarding the issue of genetic testing, premarital medical screening has been strengthened with a view to discovering genetic diseases in general and sickle cell disease and thalassaemia in particular. In that regard, a manual published in 2018 has been updated and health workers (945 as of the end of 2019) have received appropriate training. As a consequence, the screening service is now available in most (currently more than 115) primary health-care institutions. The service is optional and is provided free of charge to all persons over the age of 18. The strengthening of the screening service has led to greater societal awareness about the issue of premarital tests, and users of the service accounted for 14.8 per cent of all candidates for marriage in 2019, an increase of more than 50 per cent with respect to 2017. The Ministry of Health is working to establish a national register of persons affected by sickle cell disease and thalassaemia, which will contribute significantly to determining the effectiveness of the programme. The Ministry is also working to expand the target group to include secondary school students in order to promote premarital genetic counselling. A national centre for genetic health, which opened in 2013, provides highly specialized services in the field of genetic diseases and has laboratories equipped with the latest modern technology. It also provides advanced treatment and specialized genetic counselling. The centre also makes a significant contribution to community education on genetic diseases, and draws attention to the importance of premarital genetic screening. A total of 4,119 persons had recourse to the centre in 2020, as compared with 2,087 in 2018.

145. As concerns the prevention and early detection of congenital disabilities, a proposal has been adopted for a service to extend the testing of newborn infants to include genetic diseases and metabolic disorders. The purpose of the service, which has begun its pilot phase, is to detect, treat and prevent the disabilities associated with such diseases. An early detection programme for autism spectrum disorder and other developmental disorders was rolled out in primary health care institutions in September 2016. Cases are subsequently referred to diagnostic units and to rehabilitation centres. Health workers have received training in the service, which can be accessed by means of an online form.

146. With regard to paragraph 50 (g) of the concluding observations and the recommendation to step up monitoring and enforcement of the legislative framework regulating the marketing of breast-milk substitutes, an Omani standard for the marketing of breast-milk substitutes was adopted in 2021. It serves to safeguard breastfeeding and to prevent the inappropriate marketing of breast-milk substitutes such as infant formula, feeding bottles and teats, while also ensuring that breast-milk substitutes are used safely and as required. The Ministry of Health works alongside health-care institutions to guarantee and monitor compliance with the standard, and it takes legal action against any violations, to which end an electronic reporting system is in place.

Mental health

147. Reference is made to paragraph 52 (a), (b) and (c) of the concluding observations and to paragraph 24 (d) of the list of issues regarding measures taken to ensure an adequate number of specialists in children's mental health and adequate facilities and outpatient services for psychosocial rehabilitation; to ensure training of all professionals working with children; and to provide detailed information on policies, programmes, facilities and awareness-raising programmes. Mental health services for children are provided by 31

psychiatrists of whom 11 work in primary care institutions. Specialized child mental health services are provided at Al-Masarra Hospital. Psychologists and social workers provide assessment and psychosocial support for children with mental health disorders and their relatives. Mental health has been integrated into the package of primary health-care services and into the training of primary health-care providers. A total of 63 psychiatrists, general practitioners, family doctors and nurses have been trained in the early detection of mental disorders, the development of treatment plans, the handling of emergency psychiatric cases and the mechanism of referral to secondary or tertiary institutions.

148. In the area of professional formation, training on mental health gap interventions has been carried out by WHO-accredited trainers. Basic train-the-trainer formation has been imparted to family and community doctors, general practitioners and mental health focal points in the governorates to give them the skills they need for the early detection and treatment of common mental illnesses. Training has also been provided in the five-step approach as an approved methodology for interviewing patients, providing primary psychological services and controlling chronic diseases. In addition to this, the clinical guide to mental health (third edition) was updated in 2020 and a manual on mental health in schools has been issued. A training workshop on the Stanford–Binet Intelligence Scale (fifth edition) was held in 2017 for psychiatrists and other specialists working for the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Education. Its purpose is to help them diagnose cases of cognitive delay in children, such as intellectual disability and learning difficulties. The workshop was reactivated in a second edition in 2018 for the purpose of formulating and updating the clinical guide and other guidelines regarding mental disorders.

149. As for awareness-raising programmes, a national exhibition on autism spectrum disorders was held in 2016. At the same time, private-sector institutions have also made efforts in that regard, such as the Second International Forum on Adolescent Mental Health in 2019 which had as its theme: “Stories of solidarity”. A number of young persons, ranging in age from 10 to 22, took part in the event recounting stories of personal experiences that had led to mental suffering, and how they had overcome that suffering. The Forum also involved workshops for different age groups in which around 330 persons took part. Other initiatives include the “Be with me not over me” campaign of 2018 and the “We are with you” campaign, which aimed to draw attention to the problem of bullying, its impact on children and how to address the phenomenon in schools.

150. As concerns mental health support for children to mitigate the adverse effects of COVID-19, reference is made to paragraph 26 above, which details the educational, mental and moral support offered to children and their relatives during the pandemic.

Adolescent health

151. Reference is made to paragraph 54 (a), (b), (c) and (d) of the concluding observations, which concern the strengthening of programmes on the harmful effects of early pregnancy on the physical and mental health and well-being of girls, as well as of programmes to control iron-deficiency anaemia; the expansion of health-promoting school initiatives to all schools; the enforcement of laws prohibiting the sale of tobacco to children; and the establishment of support programmes and services to address substance abuse, and of intervention programmes and awareness-raising campaigns whose scope includes the stigma associated with treatment for substance addiction. The issue of the harmful effects of early pregnancy is part of girls’ health programmes and 17,480 female students between the ages of 10 and 11 have been educated in that regard since 2019. A booklet for mothers about girls’ sexual and reproductive health has been issued, entitled “Speak to your daughter”, and a competition entitled “Woman” of artwork and films on the subject of birth spacing was organized in the academic year 2021/22. The question concerning nutrition-related anaemia was answered in paragraph 142 above.

152. On the subject of the expansion of health-promoting school initiatives to all schools, the initiative has in fact expanded from 19 schools in 2005 to 515 in 2019. The initiative aims to promote children’s physical, mental and social health, and provide them with the knowledge and skills to pursue healthy lifestyles.

153. The “Unplugged” programme has been launched as part of awareness-raising efforts among students about the problem of drugs. It is an international programme that has been Arabized and adapted for the Omani environment in cooperation with the Mentor Arabia Foundation. The programme was originally rolled out in 15 schools in 2017 and will have been extended to all governorates by 2023. In addition to this is the 2016 “Takayuf” aftercare programme, which serves to follow up on recovering addicts and to help them maintain their recovery, reintegrate into society and overcome the challenges they face. In the same context, a national team has been formed and trained and a guidebook issued while, in 2018, a study was carried out among school students under the title: “Protecting youth from the perils of drugs”. The national committee for narcotics and psychotropic substances issues a periodical supplement entitled “Amal” detailing the efforts it undertakes, its awareness-raising programmes and its prevention efforts. The supplement appears twice a year and is distributed free of charge with one of the country’s official newspapers. A project involving mobile caravans raising awareness about the anti-drug programme was rolled out in 2016; it includes exhibitions and educational material on drugs for all sectors of society. A competition was launched in 2015 to protect communities against drugs by involving them in the search for effective solutions and adopting community projects aimed at reducing the spread of the drug problem in society. A second edition of the initiative is taking place with the evaluation of projects and the announcement of the programmes to compete in the 2021 competition. Considerable efforts are also being expended to prevent and raise awareness about sexually transmitted diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS. Since students constitute a particularly important category in that regard, the school curriculum contains scientific information about the causes of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, the ways they are transmitted and how they can be treated. These topics are also covered more broadly in the facts of life textbook, which contains age-appropriate information. Other educational programmes and activities in this field are carried out on an ongoing basis.

154. Reference is made to paragraph 25 of the list of issues concerning the measures taken to provide access for children to all forms of sexual and reproductive health care, including abortion. Reproductive health care in the Sultanate of Oman is comprehensive and includes care for adolescents, premarital medical screening, prenatal and postnatal care for women and family planning services as well as treatment for infertility, gynaecological disorders and sexually transmitted diseases. Health-care services for adolescent girls have been extended to cover girls in higher education with the creation of a new section within the structure of the Department of School and University Health which, in 2019, launched a girls’ health programme. Also in 2019, the health requirements of adolescent girls were assessed in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) with the aim of gaining an overall picture of the situation and developing key recommendations to improve their health. The assessment includes a review of data, field visits and interviews with girls themselves, and the resulting recommendations were intended to address the social, educational and environmental determinants that affect the health of adolescent girls.

155. On the subject of abortion, article 36 of the Act regulating the exercise of the medical profession and auxiliary medical professions states that an abortion may be carried out if the continuation of the pregnancy would constitute a threat to the mother’s life or would cause her to suffer a severe and intolerable illness or if, in the opinion of a medical committee, the foetus has a serious and untreatable malformation. The Government of Oman works via its Ministry of Health to provide health services near residential communities thereby enabling women to access those services, receive health advice and be administered the appropriate care. Contraceptives are available at primary health care structures and annual awareness-raising campaigns are run to draw attention to the benefits of contraception and of birth spacing. Post-abortion health care is also available, irrespective of whether or not the abortion is carried out lawfully.

I. Education, leisure and cultural activities

Education, including vocational training and guidance

156. Reference is made to paragraph 58 (a), (b) and (c) of the concluding observations, which concern the recommendation to improve accessibility and the quality of education for

all children; to provide quality training for teachers; to reduce the premature dropout rate; and to allocate sufficient financial resources to the development and expansion of early childhood education, based on a comprehensive and holistic policy of early childhood care and education services. Reference is also made to the list of issues and the request for information on the measures taken to improve accessibility and the quality of education for all children. In that connection, the Sultanate of Oman guarantees universal cultural education, as set forth in article 16 of the Children's Code, thereby making the right to education a fundamental human right. The Ministry of Education has acted to ensure that national policies and legislation, international children's rights treaties and charters and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals are all integrated into its system of educational programmes, policies and five-year plans. This includes the ongoing construction of schools built to modern standards that accommodate the needs of all children in educational districts, while keeping pace with the national priorities of Oman Vision 2040. In fact, the Vision lays great emphasis on a highly competitive system of education in Oman, one that reflects sustainable development needs and the skills of the future.

157. As for the recommendation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to improve accessibility and the quality of education for all children and to provide quality training for teachers, the State objective is to continue to improve and develop the quality of education in way consist with modern development needs. To that end, acting under Ministerial Decree No. 98/2021, the Ministry of Education has established a teachers' professional licensing office which oversees a system of continuous professional development for teachers that includes the premises, determinants, principles, competencies and conditions that need to be met so as to ensure performance quality and professional competence. The new office has developed a framework for the teaching profession in Oman and drafted the main source documents.

158. In order to enhance the quality of programmes for gifted students, which are an important bulwark sustaining the quality of education as a whole, and taking account of the national priorities enshrined in Oman Vision 2040 which enjoins combined efforts to devise a national system for talented and creative persons, and in the light of promising indicators on the progress Oman has made on the Global Talent Competitiveness Index, the Ministry has focused particular attention on that category of individuals. To that end, it has rolled out programmes for the promotion of innovation and investment in the knowledge society. One of the more significant efforts in that regard was the drafting of a document in 2016 on the identification and promotion of gifted persons. The document was approved by the Education Council and a guide is currently being drafted for talent-enrichment activities as part of the national curriculum. The guide envisions the involvement of specialists in the development of activities and programmes commensurate with the capabilities and competencies of gifted persons, in line with the latest global trends.

159. The quality of educational supervision is being enhanced via directives sent out to supervisory departments in the educational directorates, which clarify the duties and roles of supervisors as part of the educational process and explain the support mechanisms available to administrative and teaching bodies, in order to achieve high-quality education.

160. With reference to the education-related concerns raised in the list of issues, specifically professional training and guidance and the measures taken to improve accessibility and the quality of education for all children, the Ministry of Education is cooperating with other sectors on high-quality programmes and initiatives aimed at improving students' professional skills and adapting educational outcomes to the labour market. One of the most significant initiatives is called "Oman is my destination" and is being run in cooperation with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. Another is a work experience programme, being run in cooperation with various institutions that are part of the Oman labour market. Other initiatives include the "Benefits of my school" programme, run in cooperation with Fund for Agricultural and Fisheries Development and the private sector, and the "Company programme" with the Injaz Oman Foundation. Part of the latter initiative is a memorandum of understanding with the Foundation to provide a bag of training materials – the "company bag" – to students in grades 8 to 12.

161. In relation to the recommendation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to make efforts to reduce the premature dropout rate, and to the request in paragraph 26 (b) of

the list of issues to inform the Committee on steps taken to prevent children from dropping out of school, the Ministry of Education is anxious to ensure the regular attendance of students and to raise their pass rate, thereby ensuring that they are able to exercise their right to education. To this end, the Ministry runs programmes and activities to reduce school dropout and applies norms intended to safeguard the right of students to benefit from educational activities and learning resources while at school. It ensures they have access to appropriate health care, supplies healthy meals and lays on transportation to and from school. The Ministry is also involved in the formation of student councils which consider topics of interest to the students themselves and it has opened channels of communication with schools via comment boxes, email, direct dialogue, student radio, questionnaires and other communication tools. Regulations for students in State-run schools include rules governing the admission, registration and transfer of students, the regularity of their attendance and their behavioural discipline.

162. As concerns paragraph 58 (c) of the concluding observations and the recommendation to develop and expand early childhood education, based on a comprehensive and holistic policy of early childhood care and education services, the Ministry of Education, having first coordinated with the Ministry of Social Development, issued Ministerial Decree No. 259/2021. Under the Decree, administrative and technical supervision of child development homes is to be transferred from the Ministry of Social Development to the Ministry of Education. The structures are to be called “early development homes”, subject to the same regulations as special schools and provided with facilities to help promote the integration of the children into preschool education.

163. One development initiative in the field of children’s rights is a project to promote kindergartens, which is being rolled out by the Ministry of Social Development in cooperation with the Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND). A field evaluation study on conditions in kindergartens and ways to develop them has been conducted in cooperation with Sultan Qaboos University, and in 2018 a national seminar was held to discuss how to improve conditions in kindergartens and to increase the number of children enrolled. The Ministry has cooperated with other stakeholders and experts to produce six documents intended to be used by specialists and caregivers: a guide to national standards for kindergartens, their operating mechanisms and classification; a health-care guide; a guide for parents and guardians; and three guides for persons who work with children, divided according to age group. The purpose of the documents is to ensure a safe and supportive environment for children in families and nurseries. The project is consistent with the social work strategy on integrated early childhood development. As of the end of 2021, there were 318 kindergartens across all the governorates.

164. Within the framework of cooperation between the Government and UNICEF on a joint national programme 2017–2020, an integrated early childhood development project was rolled out in Oman. It focuses on school curricula and educational tools, staff training, governance of early childhood care and education, physical infrastructure standards, nutritional support, access and equity, and support for parents in raising their children.

165. The Ministry of Education has developed guidelines on preschool education for kindergartens and private schools to help them select the best and most appropriate curricula that take account of the developmental specificities of the child, in line with international standards and the local needs of children.

166. State-run and private institutions of higher education, each according to its own remit, are involved in training persons specialized in early childhood care and education. Such persons are thus qualified to work as teachers or supervisors in childcare institutions such as kindergartens and nurseries, in line with children’s developmental needs.

167. As concerns paragraph 26 (b) of the list of issues and the request for information on steps taken to tackle instances of sexual harassment, in 2021 the Ministry of Education drafted a paper to regulate procedures for dealing with instances of certain behaviour in State-run and private schools. Furthermore, the Ministry issued a guide for schools on protecting children from abuse, in 2019.

168. Measures are being taken to protect students in their daily school activities. These include the presence of security guards in schools, visitors’ registers, allowing children to

leave school only with permission and on the basis of written documentation, greater protection measures in school buses and the adoption of school transport regulations under Ministerial Decree No. 58/2020. Cases of abuse are studied in cooperation with child protection committees. This is in addition to measures to safeguard students' health and safety through the imposition of food safety standards in school canteens. Programmes have been rolled out and adopted wherewith to evaluate and monitor schools. As concerns cyberbullying, student regulations have been updated in line with the latest developments in education, with the inclusion of provisions intended to promote positive behaviour on the part of students and the safe use of the Internet and e-learning platforms.

169. With regard to paragraph 26 (c) of the list of issues, during the COVID-19 pandemic the Sultanate of Oman sought to identify and mitigate the disproportionate effects of the pandemic on children. Efforts made in that connection are detailed in paragraphs 20–23 above.

170. As concerns paragraph 26 (d) of the list of issues and the efforts made to ensure that any technology recommended for online learning ensures children's privacy rights by protecting children's education data and other private information collected online, efforts have been made to strengthen digital protection. The focus in that regard has been on the role of educational institutions and on training social workers in safe Internet use and information security. A number of workshops have been held to raise community awareness about parental-control software and the safe use of the Internet. Support groups of administrative and teaching staff have been organized to educate students and parents about enhanced online protection of students' personal data files, collection rates and behavioural indicators.

171. In order to promote national efforts in this regard, the National Centre for Online Safety, which is part of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, has also been working to raise awareness about cybersecurity. In that context, and in order to achieve its vision of providing cybersecurity capabilities, it has rolled out a child online protection project, one of the first initiatives of its kind in Oman and the Arab world. The project includes several programmes and activities, such as a child online protection campaign, a national child online protection strategy, a national child online protection portal and a theatre project that seeks to enhance children's innovational skills in the field of information technology.

172. As concerns paragraph 26 (e) of the list of issues and the efforts made to include children's rights at all levels of formal and informal education, the matter of human rights education and civic education was already addressed in the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Oman. The Ministry of Education has been drafting a document for the integration of concepts relating to human and children's rights and to education for peace into the curricula for different levels of schooling. In 2017, the curricula were redeveloped and redesigned to reflect the national philosophy of education, which includes a body of principles relating to human rights and obligations, namely: promoting a culture of human rights and obligations, enhancing awareness of humanitarian issues, developing positive attitudes towards oneself and others, consolidating the right to education, promoting awareness of the rights of women and children, drawing attention to the needs of persons with disabilities and the importance of respecting such persons and interacting with them positively, and promoting the right of individuals to participate in political and societal affairs.

173. A list of general concepts was issued for inclusion in the 2019 curriculum, with an explanation of how they were to be integrated and promoted within the school curricula and activities. These concepts include education in human and children's rights, most notably the rights to life, safety, equality, education, property, freedom and dignity.

J. Special protection measures

Asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children

174. Reference is made to paragraph 59 of the concluding observations and to the recommendation contained in paragraph 60 to establish policies for the provision of education, health and other social services to all children present in Oman, including children

of documented and undocumented migrant workers and refugees, to become a party to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its Protocol and to provide assistance and protection to refugees and asylum-seekers. As Oman noted in its combined third and fourth periodic reports, the children of documented and undocumented migrant workers enjoy full rights vis-à-vis health, education and social care. Moreover, the Children's Code guarantees the rights of all children residing in the Sultanate of Oman, as confirmed by the provisions it contains relating to health, social and educational rights. These provisions also apply to the issues raised in paragraph 27 of the list of issues in relation to asylum-seeking and refugee children.

Economic exploitation, including child labour

175. As concerns paragraph 28 of the list of issues on the subject of the economic exploitation of children, including child labour, no such exploitation takes place in the internationally accepted meaning of the term. There are family-based activities in agriculture and fishing in which children participate voluntarily alongside their families, without affecting the progress of their studies or their physical and mental development.

176. As concerns paragraph 29 of the list of issues and trafficking in children, articles 2 and 9 of the Human Trafficking Act criminalize all exploitation of children, their involvement in begging or the sale of their organs. On the subject of camel racing, the use of children as jockeys is prohibited under Ministerial Decree No. 7/2009.

177. Children aged 15 and over are allowed to work under rules and conditions set forth in articles 76–79 of the Labour Code and in Ministerial Decree No. 217/2016 regulating the employment of juveniles and the jobs and professions in which they may be engaged. It should be noted that the employment of 15-year-olds is restricted exclusively to the jobs and professions described in Ministerial Decree No. 217/2016 regulating the employment of juveniles, and that they may not be engaged in any other forms of employment. The employment of juveniles in the jobs and professions set forth in the Decree is subject not only to the conditions described in the Labour Code, but also to other conditions contained in the Decree. The most significant of these are as follows: An employer may not employ a juvenile before having obtained written consent from the party responsible for the juvenile's care, upbringing and development; the juvenile worker is to be registered with the Public Authority for Social Insurance in accordance with relevant laws and regulations; training is to be provided on occupational health and safety; and the juvenile is to undergo a medical examination before joining the workforce, periodically every six months thereafter and at the termination of service. The purpose of this latter provision is to ensure that the juvenile is fit to perform the work in question, is free from illnesses and has suffered no occupational injuries. The medical examination is to be evidenced by a medical certificate approved by the competent health authority.

178. The Ministry of Labour has inspection teams at the competent departments in all governorates through which it monitors child employment conditions. The teams conduct field inspections with a view to discovering any violations of the Labour Code, Ministerial Decrees or their implementing regulations, including any legal provisions relating to the employment of juveniles. If any such violations are discovered, the teams pursue due legal action.

179. Reference is made to paragraph 62 (a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f) of the concluding observations, which concerns finalizing the study on the phenomenon of child labour; taking measures to prevent children from being economically exploited; finalizing the list of occupations deemed to be detrimental to children's health; taking appropriate measures to address the problem of children begging in the streets; continuing to raise awareness of the negative consequences of child labour; and seeking technical assistance from the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour. In this connection, it should first be noted that the phenomenon of the employment of children under the age of 15 does not exist. This is in accordance with article 75 of the Labour Code, which contains an absolute prohibition that covers all children in the Sultanate of Oman, without discrimination and irrespective of their nationality or sex. Children aged 15 and over are allowed to work under rules and conditions set forth in articles 76–79 of the Labour Code and in Ministerial Decree

No. 217/2016 regulating the employment of juveniles and the jobs and professions in which they may be engaged.

180. As concerns measures taken to address the problem of children begging, persons can be apprehended for exploiting children as beggars or for renting children and, in return a payment made to the child's family, using them as a means of begging and exploiting public compassion by displaying forged documents concerning imaginary accidents and diseases. In fact, under article 298 of the Criminal Code, anyone who uses a child in begging or hands a child to another for that purpose is liable to a term of imprisonment of between 3 months and 3 years and/or to a fine of between RO 50 and RO 100. The penalty envisaged is redoubled if the offender is the parent or guardian of the child concerned or is responsible for supervising and caring for the child.

Administration of juvenile justice

181. Reference is made to paragraph 66 (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f) and (g) of the concluding observations, to the Committee's general comment No. 10 (2007) on children's rights in juvenile justice as amended by its general comment No. 24 (2019) on children's rights in the child justice system, and to paragraph 30 of the list of issues on raising the age of criminal responsibility. In that regard, the Sultanate of Oman is working to bring its Juvenile Accountability Act into line with international treaties.

182. Oman is particularly attentive to the issue of promoting restorative justice and non-custodial measures as alternatives to detention as delineated in paragraph 66 (c) of the concluding observations and paragraph 30 (b) of the list of issues. In fact, in section II of the Juvenile Accountability Act, which covers measures and penalties applicable to juveniles in conflict with the law, legislators have placed the measures before the penalties. This is both an indication and a guarantee that the primary instrument is that of redeeming the juveniles by means of the care and reform measures set forth in that section; penalties come after that, as a secondary means of reform. Oman has focused on processing cases involving juveniles in such a way as to guarantee the best interests of the child; it has also made a choice in favour of non-custodial measures and has ensured that detention is used only as a measure of last resort. In fact, statistics show that, while 31 cases were referred to juvenile correction homes in 2016, that number had fallen to 22 by 2020. Specialists in this field periodically hold workshops and training courses to discuss mechanisms for examining cases involving juveniles across the governorates of Oman, and to consider proposals for alternative measures.

183. Reference is made to paragraph 66 (d) of the concluding observations regarding action to ensure that adequate facilities exist for children in conflict with the law, and that their conditions of detention are compliant with international standards, including with regard to access to education and health services; reference is likewise made to paragraph 30 (c) of the list of issues and the need to take due account of the particular vulnerability of children and of the risks of detention to their development, especially the disruption it causes to their education. In this regard, Oman wishes to reiterate that detention is used only as a last resort, that care and reform measures exist and that there is no recourse to detention until such measures are shown to have been ineffective. This is in line with the recommendations emerging from the United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty. The Juvenile Accountability Act guarantees the rights of juveniles facing penalties prescribed under the Act, which are all aimed at achieving the legislators' supreme purpose; i.e., reforming juveniles and bringing them back to the right path. It should be noted, moreover, that legislators have adopted a gradual approach in the care and reform measures applicable to juveniles; for example, article 15 of the Act envisages a number of measures, including that of delivering the juvenile into the custody of a person capable of providing the necessary ethical guarantees and care, or of a reprimand or forbidding the juvenile from frequenting certain places, as well as other measures. Article 18 of the Act states that not all the measures envisaged under article 15 are applicable to persons under the age of 18, who can only be handed into the custody of a carer or reprimanded.

184. The following five reform measures set forth in article 20 of the Act: placement in a juvenile correction home, placement under probation, enrolment in vocational training, compulsory fulfilment of specific obligations and placement in a health-care institution. Article 21 states that placement in a correction home is to take place under a court ruling;

this constitutes a guarantee for the juvenile that the legal proceedings have taken account of his or her best interests.

185. In the imposition of care or reform measures, the Act also takes due account of the age of the juvenile concerned. According to article 27, if a juvenile offender under the age of 16 commits a crime or multiple crimes, or commits more than one crime for a single and indissolubly linked purpose, the offender may be sentenced only to one or more of the measures set forth in articles 15 and 20 of the Act. For its part, article 28 states that, if the prescribed penalty for an offence is a term of imprisonment, the juvenile is to be sentenced to half the maximum term, to be served in a juvenile correction home.

186. A specific feature of the Juvenile Accountability Act is that legislators have granted judges the right to review a sentence or order imposing one of the measures in question, which the judge can suspend or amend at the request of the Office of the Public Prosecution, of the juvenile or of the juvenile's parents or guardians. The relevant provisions are contained in article 43 of the Act.

187. From all the information given above, it is clear that Oman protects the rights of juveniles, safeguards their development and provides them with comprehensive care. Oman is particularly concerned about the education of juveniles who have been placed in homes and, in fact, teaching centres run by the Ministry of Education enable juveniles to pursue their studies during the period they spend in a correction home.

188. Reference is made to paragraph 30 (c) of the list of issues and the prompt provision of legal assistance to children in conflict with the law. In that connection, paragraph 71 above explained how the best interests of the child are taken into account in the Juvenile Accountability Act. Article 39 of the Act, in fact, envisages prompt legal assistance for child offenders. According to that provision, it is the responsibility of the parents of the child concerned or of a third party to engage a lawyer on the child's behalf. If they fail to engage the services of a lawyer, one is to be appointed by the court. Article 11 of the Juvenile Accountability Act states that juveniles are to be exempt from all court fees or expenses and that no fines may be handed down against them. It should be noted that legal assistance for children begins with the Juvenile Police Unit, which is the body responsible for matters relating to juveniles who fall under the Juvenile Accountability Act. As soon as it is notified of a case by the Office of the Public Prosecution, the Department of Juvenile Affairs of the Ministry of Social Development examines the situation of the juvenile concerned, while social workers undertake to communicate with the juvenile's family and examine the case in all its social, psychological, educational, economic and residential aspects. They then make appropriate recommendations, which are communicated to the courts.

189. Reference is made to paragraph 66 (b) of the concluding observations and to paragraph 30 (e) of the list of issues regarding the adoption of a holistic and preventive approach to addressing the problem of children in conflict with the law and the underlying social factors. The institutions concerned understand the importance of prevention as a way of protecting juveniles from delinquency and lawbreaking. They therefore run constant awareness-raising campaigns and take part in relevant conferences, forums and exhibitions. In addition, a number of lectures and seminars have been held, most notably the Arab Sixth Regional Convention on the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, which Oman hosted in 2019 under the auspices of the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN); the 2019 Social Week, which aimed to raise community awareness, also among children, to cases involving juveniles and the Juvenile Accountability Act; the fourth student counselling centre forum entitled "Towards integrated counselling services", held in cooperation with Sultan Qaboos University in 2021; and ongoing awareness-raising programmes in schools, which are held throughout the year and in different governorates.

190. As concerns paragraph 66 (e) of the concluding observations regarding the provision of effective rehabilitation services, article 20 (e) of the Juvenile Accountability Act envisions the possibility of placing a juvenile offender in a health-care institution, whereafter periodic reports on the health of the juvenile concerned are to be submitted to the court. For its part, article 25 of the Act envisages mental health services and substance abuse treatment for juveniles, in appropriate health-care institutions. During the period of their placement,

juveniles follow rehabilitative, educational and vocational programmes to enable them to reintegrate into society following their release.

191. As regards paragraph 66 (f) of the concluding observations and the enhancement of the skills and specialization of all relevant actors in the juvenile justice system, Oman does in fact run training programmes to improve the skills and effectiveness of those actors.

192. On the subject of paragraph 66 (g) of the concluding observations, Oman has developed up-to-date technological systems for the administration of juvenile justice. These include an online link between the Department of Juvenile Affairs and other partners such as the Office of the Public Prosecution and the juvenile courts. The link can be used for conducting juvenile trials remotely.

193. In 2020, to follow up on recommendations relating to juvenile justice made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Ministry of Social Development held panel discussions on that topic and the relevant international source documents. The initiative, which involved a number of specialists from child-protection bodies, served to discuss the Committee's concluding observations and recommendations on national reports, to review laws and legislation relevant to juvenile justice and to examine manuals, international guiding principles and basic concepts related to the protection of children's rights.

K. Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography

194. Reference is made to paragraph 67 of the concluding observations and to the recommendation in paragraph 68 urging all appropriate measures to ensure full implementation of the recommendations contained in the concluding observations of 2009 ([CRC/C/OPSC/OMN/CO/1](#)), and in particular to review the Criminal Code and make it fully compatible with articles 2 and 3 of the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; reference is likewise made to paragraph 31 of the list of issues and the measures taken to incorporate all definitions contained in article 3 of the Optional Protocol into the Criminal Code, as well as the measures to prevent offences and provide assistance to child victims of offences. In that connection, Oman can state that – in its combined third and fourth periodic reports under the Convention on the Rights of the Child – it has already replied to the 2009 concluding observations to the effect that no sale or trafficking of children takes place. Nonetheless, national legislation does address the offences envisaged in articles 2 and 3 of the Optional Protocol and article 254 of the Criminal Code envisages penalties for anyone who incites, lures, seduces or assists a person into prostitution or depravity using any means, where such action leads to the commission of a crime, if the victim is under the age of 18 or if the perpetrator is an antecedent of the victim, is responsible for the care of the victim or has authority over the victim. Similar provisions are also to be found in articles 2, 3 and 5 of the Human Trafficking Act, articles 56 and 72 of the Children's Code and articles 14, 15, 22 and 23 of the Cybercrime Act.

195. The Children's Code includes terms contained in the Optional Protocol, such as the definition of "exploitation". Article 56 of the Code prohibits the abduction or sale of children or the transfer of their organs in any way, with or without payment. The Code also prohibits any pressure or coercion on children to engage in sexual activity; the exploitation of children in prostitution or other sexual practices or in pornographic shows or materials; the encouragement of children to undertake real or simulated sexual activities, filming them in such activities or the representation of the sexual parts of a child in any way. All conditions and procedures relating to foster care are contained in the implementing regulations of the Code, and the penalties for any violations are set forth in its article 72.

196. With regard to measures taken to prevent offences and provide assistance to child victims of offences under the Optional Protocol, apart from enacting the aforementioned laws and legislation which criminalize the acts described in the Protocol, the Sultanate of Oman protects victims and provides them with health, psychological and social care. It also provides shelters and assists victims in their reintegration into society, in homes run by the Ministry of Social Development.

L. Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict

197. Reference is made to paragraph 69 of the concluding observations and to the recommendation in paragraph 70 urging all appropriate measures to ensure full implementation of the recommendations contained in the concluding observations of 2009 (CRC/C/OPAC/OMN/CO/1), and in particular to raise the age of voluntary recruitment into the national armed forces to 18 years and to review the Criminal Code and make it fully compatible with the Optional Protocol; reference is likewise made to paragraph 32 (a) of the list of issues and the prohibition of the voluntary enrolment of children, including children over 16 years of age, in the armed forces. In that connection, Oman can state that there are no child conscripts, volunteers or participants in combat operations who are under the age of 18. In fact, the minimum age for military recruitment into the Sultan's Armed Forces is 18. In fact, article 38 (3) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that States parties are to refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of 15 years into their armed forces.

198. Article 55 of the Children's Code prohibits the forced recruitment of children into the armed forces, their recruitment into armed groups or their involvement in combat operations. Children may volunteer for the armed forces once they have reached the age of 16. The State acts to ensure that this prohibition is respected and takes the measures necessary to that end. In this regard, article 55 of the Children's Code is consistent with article 2 of the Optional Protocol, and subparagraph 1 of that article imposes an absolute prohibition on forced recruitment. Article 55 is also consistent with article 3 of the Optional Protocol in that it sets a lower age limit of 16 for voluntary recruitment. In practical terms, however, there are no cases of children volunteering for the armed forces.

199. As concerns reviewing the Criminal Code to make it compatible with the Optional Protocol, Oman has in fact updated its Criminal Code, enacting a new law to take its place under Royal Decree No. 7/74, which is consistent with international treaties.

200. With reference to the recommendation in the 2009 concluding observations to provide members of the armed forces with training on the provisions of the Protocol, it should be noted that, in addition to the training courses mentioned in the combined third and fourth periodic reports, the Ministry of Social Development has trained a number of trainers from different agencies to help raise awareness about the Convention and its two Optional Protocols. The Ministry has also run training courses for members of the armed forces on other international instruments related to armed conflicts, including the Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Furthermore, the Oman Human Rights Commission, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, has held 66 lectures on children's rights for students in State-run and community schools. The Commission has also published various booklets on the Convention and its two Optional Protocols.

201. Reference is made to the recommendation in the 2009 concluding observations regarding the protection, recovery and reintegration of asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children. The Sultanate of Oman focuses great attention on child protection, and domestic child-related legislation addresses all aspects of protection for children resident in the State. This, despite the fact that the country is not a party to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and is not a member of the International Organization for Migration.

202. Reference is made to paragraph 32 (b) of the list of issues, which concerns the establishment of mechanisms to identify children coming from areas affected by armed conflict and the provision of physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration for such children. In this connection, Oman can affirm that – acting on the basis of humanitarian and rights-related considerations and of international treaties and protocols relating to children's rights – it possesses the means to extend a helping hand to children in such circumstances.

203. Reference is made to paragraph 32 (c) of the list of issues, in which Oman is enjoined to endorse, comply with and promote the Safe Schools Declaration and ensure that laws, policies and training materials make explicit reference to the protection of schools and universities from military use during armed conflict. It should be noted that schools and universities are considered to be part of basic State infrastructure and that their role is

circumscribed to the provision of education. They have no connection with any conflict or with any matter that lies outside the scope of the educational process. The Ministry of Defence and the Sultan's Armed Forces protect national territory and everything on it, including basic infrastructure, in which regard they follow the national guide to rules of engagement. The Sultanate of Oman takes it upon itself to protect its future and that of coming generations, both in time of peace and time of war, and no educational facility may be used for military purposes, even that of training.

Conclusion

204. The present report is the outcome of joint efforts by various government bodies, national committees, civil society institutions and children themselves. It reflects the progress that has been made in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including an appraisal and assessment of the most outstanding gains. The Sultanate of Oman continues to consolidate its rights-based approach in all the actions and measures it takes to protect children's rights.

III. Statistical information and data

205. Annex 1 contains statistics that serve as a reply to paragraphs 35 to 50 of the list of issues, for the years 2016–2020.
