



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

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

**Fifth periodic report submitted by Benin under article 18 of
the Convention, due in 2017***

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Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	3
Part one: General policy measures	3
Part two: Status of women in Benin with reference to the Convention	5
Articles 1 and 2: Discrimination and incorporation of the principles of the Convention into domestic law	5
Articles 3 and 4: Appropriate steps and special measures	7
Article 5: Elimination of stereotypes and discriminatory sociocultural behaviour	9
Article 6: Suppression of the exploitation of women	9
Articles 7 and 8: Participation in public and political life and in international decision-making bodies	11
Article 9: Right to acquire, change and retain nationality	13
Article 10: Equal rights to education and vocational training	14
Article 11: Equal access to work	16
Article 12: Equality in health care	16
Article 13: Economic and social life of women	18
Article 14: Rights of rural women	20
Article 15: Equality before the law	21
Article 16: Marriage and family life	21
Conclusion	22

Introduction

1. The present periodic report is submitted under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
2. This report, which covers the period 2014–2017, in accordance with the latest concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, also includes data for the period 2017–2019.
3. During the period covered by the report, the Government of Benin took a number of steps to end discriminatory behaviour and practices against women. Those steps have significantly improved the status of women by reducing gender inequality and providing women with the same rights and opportunities provided for in various global development documents and strategies, including the Sustainable Development Goals.
4. Discriminatory practices against women nevertheless continue to exist in Benin owing to the persistence of sociological constraints and certain customary and cultural habits that confine the vast majority of women to traditional and secondary roles.
5. In the report, Benin sets out the current legal status of women, provides an assessment of the progress made and identifies the challenges that it continues to face in fulfilling its international commitments to protect the rights of women.
6. The report was prepared following an inclusive and participatory process, during which government entities and civil society actors helped to collect, compile and verify information. That process was supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under the Project to Support Improved Access to Justice and Accountability.
7. Part one of the report contains information concerning general policies for the period covered by the report. Part two highlights the efforts of Benin to implement the various articles of the Convention and indicates the difficulties associated with its implementation.
8. Most of the information in the present report comes from government sources. Footnotes are not used.

Part one: General policy measures

9. In the fourth General Population and Housing Census, the population of Benin was found to be 10,008,749, with women accounting for 51.2 per cent and young people under the age of 20 for 56.9 per cent. In 2018, the population was estimated at 11,496,140; of that total, 5,849,081 were women.
10. According to an analysis entitled “Main sociodemographic and economic indicators, fourth General Population and Housing Census (2013)” (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Analysis, 2016), about 55 per cent of women live in rural areas.

Economic situation

11. The poverty situation remains a concern, with 40.1 per cent of the population living below the monetary poverty line. The human development index was estimated at 0.48 in 2015, placing Benin in 166th position out of 188 countries.
12. According to a study conducted by the World Bank in December 2018, the economy of Benin relies heavily on informal re-export and transit trade with Nigeria,

which accounts for about 20 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), and on agriculture.

13. Growth accelerated in 2017, increasing from 4 per cent to 5.6 per cent (or a GDP per capita growth rate of 2.7 per cent), owing to gains in the agricultural sector, in particular an increase in cotton production.

14. Growth was also driven by an increase in public investment (mainly in infrastructure) and by the very strong performance of the services sector, which benefited from the recovery of the Nigerian economy.

15. The inflation rate returned to a positive level, averaging 0.1 per cent in 2017 (compared with -0.8 per cent in 2016), as a result of rising oil and food prices.

16. The current account deficit increased from 9 to 11 per cent of GDP between 2016 and 2017, driven by energy- and infrastructure-related imports.

Social situation

17. Despite economic growth of between 4 and 5 per cent per year for the past two decades, poverty remains widespread owing to low per capita growth rates (only 1.6 per cent during the period 2006–2016).

18. The education and health sectors account for a significant share of public spending (an average of 23 and 7 per cent, respectively). The resources allocated to those sectors must be equitably distributed throughout the country and must be more efficiently managed.

19. A number of other general policy measures have also been adopted and made operational. Examples include:

- The strengthening of governance, democracy and the rule of law through the organization of presidential elections in March 2016, leading to a change in government.
- The adoption, in December 2016, of the Government Action Programme for the period 2016–2021. Consisting of 45 flagship projects, 95 sectoral projects and 19 institutional reforms, the Programme is aimed at promoting not only the economic and social transformation of Benin but also the implementation of a more balanced democratic framework and strengthened governance. One of the Programme's objectives is to improve the living conditions of high-priority populations by providing social protection for the most disadvantaged people and establishing a policy to support the development of income-generating activities, continuing education and entrepreneurship, as well as the granting of microcredit for the funding of specific projects.
- The designation in 2016 of 6 new departmental capitals, bringing the total number to 12, and the nomination of six new prefects.
- The development of the 2012–2015 national action plan for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour in Benin.
- The adoption in 2018 of a second national action plan for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour for the period 2019–2023.
- The prioritization of the Sustainable Development Goal targets relating to the promotion of the rights of women and children (Goals 4, 5, 10 and 16).
- The establishment in Benin of the Human Rights Commission of Benin under Act No. 12-36 of 15 February 2013 and the commencement of work by its members on 3 January 2019.

- The adoption of Act No. 2017-06 of 13 April 2017 on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in Benin.
- The establishment of a permanent mechanism for the collection of household data through the Integrated Modular Survey on Household Living Conditions.

Part two: Status of women in Benin with reference to the Convention

Articles 1 and 2: Discrimination and incorporation of the principles of the Convention into domestic law

20. The word “discrimination” has not been expressly defined in the domestic law of Benin, but the principle has been set out in the Constitution and included in a number of laws and regulations.

21. Article 2 of the Constitution provides that “the Republic of Benin is one and indivisible, secular and democratic”. Its principle is government of the people, by the people and for the people.

22. Article 6 provides as follows: “Suffrage is universal, equal and secret. All Beninese nationals of both sexes aged 18 and older who enjoy their civil and political rights shall be eligible to vote under the conditions determined by law”.

23. A number of other constitutional provisions expressly establish the right of women to equal treatment before the law (art. 26), access to health, education, culture, information, vocational training and employment (art. 8), property (art. 22), work and fair remuneration for their services and production (art. 30).

24. The principle of non-discrimination, which is enshrined in the Constitution, has been strengthened through the adoption of several laws, including:

- Act No. 2017-06 of 13 April 2017 on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities
- Act No. 2015-08 of 8 December 2015 establishing the Children’s Code

25. Beninese positive law prohibits all forms of discrimination against women.

26. In addition, the current Criminal Code incorporates the provisions of Act No. 2006-19 of 5 September 2006 on the punishment of sexual harassment and the protection of victims in the Republic of Benin.

27. Under article 550 of the Criminal Code, sexual harassment is defined as the giving of orders, the repeated use of words, gestures, writing or messages, the making of threats, the imposition of constraints, the exertion of pressure or the use of any other methods by an individual in order to obtain, from a person in a situation of vulnerability or subordination, favours of a sexual nature for his or her own benefit or for the benefit of a third party against the will of the person being subjected to the harassment.

28. Under the Criminal Code, sexual harassment is punishable by a fine of 1 million CFA francs or a prison sentence of one to two years, or by both of those penalties.

29. Article 553 of the Criminal Code provides that the vulnerability of the victim as a result of his or her age, social or economic status, physical or mental condition or any other related situation shall constitute an aggravating circumstance, as determined by a judge. When sexual harassment is committed by a legitimate, natural or adoptive

older relative of the victim or against a minor, the guilty party shall be subject to a prison sentence of two to five years and a fine of 500,000 to 1 million CFA francs. The penalty shall be doubled for repeat offences.

30. Article 526 of the Criminal Code provides as follows: “Anyone who performs genital mutilation or any other operation on the organs of a woman shall be punished by a prison sentence of between six months and three years and by a fine of between 100,000 and 2 million CFA francs”. Female genital mutilation is defined as the total or partial removal of a woman’s external genitalia. When genital mutilation is performed on a minor under the age of 18, the guilty party shall be punished by a prison sentence of three to five years and a fine of up to 3 million CFA francs. In the event of the victim’s death, the guilty party shall be punished by a sentence of life imprisonment.

31. Any person who is aware of incidents of female genital mutilation is required to immediately inform the Public Prosecutor or the nearest judicial police officer for legal purposes.

32. The failure to report such incidents is punishable by a fine of 250,000 to 500,000 CFA francs.

33. In addition, under article 185 of Act No. 2015-08 of 8 December 2015 establishing the Children’s Code in the Republic of Benin, all forms of sexual mutilation are prohibited. Article 188 provides for assistance for child victims of sexual mutilation.

34. In partnership with civil society organizations and with the technical and financial support of development partners, the Government has implemented a number of programmes and projects and has adopted specific strategies concerning women. These initiatives include:

- A programme aimed at combating forced and early marriage
- Information and awareness-raising campaigns concerning women’s rights, girls’ education and harmful traditional practices
- A programme aimed at combating female genital mutilation
- A project focused on capacity-building for and the management of women electoral candidates and elected women officials
- The strengthening of activities to improve the representation of women in decision-making bodies
- A national policy on the promotion of gender equality
- The 2012–2015 gender action plan for the agricultural sector (Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, 2012)
- The 2009–2016 national action plan on the family
- The development of the 2009–2018 national health development plan
- A programme to strengthen the legal status and socioeconomic capacities of women
- A programme aimed at combating violence against women and girls
- A national programme on reproductive health
- A strategy to secure reproductive health commodities
- A national multisectoral strategy for the sexual and reproductive health of youth and adolescents

Articles 3 and 4: Appropriate steps and special measures

35. Benin has incorporated a gender-sensitive approach into its strategies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, with Goal 5 relating to gender equality and Goal 10 concerning the reduction of inequalities. The political will to integrate a gender perspective into development strategies is reflected in the Programme on Growth for Sustainable Development and in the National Policy for the Promotion of Gender Equality through a multisectoral action plan for the period 2010–2015 (Republic of Benin, 2009).

Laws and regulations on combating discrimination against women

36. Since the submission of the last periodic report, the normative framework on the implementation of the Convention has been strengthened through the adoption of a number of laws and regulations:

- Act No. 2018-16 of 28 December 2018 establishing the Criminal Code in the Republic of Benin
- Act No. 2018-17 of 28 June 2018 amending and supplementing Act No. 2012-15 establishing the Code of Criminal Procedure in the Republic of Benin
- Act No. 2015-18 of 1 September 2017 establishing the General Civil Service Regulations
- Act No. 2017-15 of 10 August 2017 amending and supplementing Act No. 2013-01 of 14 August 2013 establishing the Land (Private and State-owned) Code in the Republic of Benin
- Act No. 2015-19 of 2 April 2015 amending and supplementing Act No. 86-014 of 26 September 1986 establishing the Civil Service and Military Retirement Pensions Code
- Decree No. 2015-161 of 13 April 2015 on the establishment, powers, organization and operation of the National Institute for the Advancement of Women
- Decree No. 2015-029 of 29 January 2015 establishing the terms and conditions for the acquisition of rural land in the Republic of Benin, implementing Act No. 2017-15 of 10 August 2017 amending and supplementing Act No. 2013-01 of 14 August 2013 on the Land (Private and State-owned) Code in the Republic of Benin

Measures to promote gender equality

37. The Government of Benin continues to implement its National Policy for the Promotion of Gender Equality in order to eliminate discriminatory behaviours and practices, significantly improve the status of women and offer both sexes the same opportunities and chances. The following activities have been conducted as part of that initiative:

- Increasing of the amount of microcredit granted to the poorest individuals
- Adoption of a new regulatory framework to facilitate women's access to credit through digital finance
- Continuation of policies on free education for girls
- Continuation of the policy to subsidize caesarean sections through the provision of caesarean section kits

- Extension of the school canteen policy aimed at keeping girls in school
- Strengthening of rural women's credit management capacities
- Provision of equipment to women's groups for the processing of agricultural products

Institutional measures to eliminate discrimination against women

38. Several State and non-State institutions are involved in the promotion and protection of women's rights in Benin. The State institutions involved are as follows:

- The Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance, through, among other entities:
 - The Directorate for the Promotion of Women and Gender Equality
 - The Observatory on the Family, Women and Children
 - Departmental directorates on the family
 - Social welfare centres
- The Ministry of the Interior and Public Security, through:
 - The Central Office for the Protection of Minors, the Family and the Punishment of Trafficking in Persons and its regional offices and focal points
 - Police stations
- The Ministry of Public Health, through:
 - The Directorate for Maternal and Child Health
 - The Integrated Centres for the Care of Victims of Gender-based Violence (Cotonou-Abomey-Parakou)

The non-State entities concerned are as follows:

- Association des femmes juristes du Bénin (Association of Women Legal Experts of Benin)
- Association des femmes avocates du Bénin (Association of Women Lawyers of Benin)
- Réseau femmes droit et développement en Afrique (Network of Women in Law and Development in Africa) (WILDAF-Benin)
- Réseau pour l'intégration des femmes des organisations non-gouvernementales et associations africaines (Network of African Non-Governmental Organizations and Associations for the Integration of Women) (RIFONGA-Benin)
- Plateforme pour la participation des femmes aux instances de décisions au Bénin (Platform for the Participation of Women in Decision-making Bodies in Benin) (PFID-Benin)

39. Despite the efforts made by the Government with the support of technical and financial partners and civil society organizations, some discrimination against women persists, as demonstrated by:

- The challenges faced in gaining access to justice in cases of violence as a result of poverty
- The challenges faced in gaining access to justice in cases of violence owing to a lack of knowledge of judicial procedures

- The challenges faced in gaining access to justice in cases of violence as a result of illiteracy and sociological constraints
- The inadequate implementation of laws adopted to empower women and promote gender equality

Article 5: Elimination of stereotypes and discriminatory sociocultural behaviour

40. Despite the legal measures put in place in Benin, certain behaviours that discriminate against women persist. Stereotypes are still prevalent in some people's minds.

41. However, during the reporting period, the policies and programmes introduced have had a strong impact on the social life of the population in Benin, leading to a significant reduction in harmful practices against women and girls, including in the following areas:

- Decrease in the practice of “vidomègon”, or “child fostering”, with a growing number of young girls attending school or enrolling in training workshops.
- Decrease in cases of forced marriage, early marriage and female genital mutilation in high-prevalence areas.
- Rise in civic and citizen engagement in gender issues and the advancement of women.

42. The Government is continuing to review school textbooks to eliminate the existing stereotypical images of men and women that shape the personality of learners, especially in nursery and primary education.

43. All these actions have enabled communities to gain a better understanding of their rights and obligations in combating gender-based violence and discrimination.

44. Awareness-raising efforts are ongoing with a view to changing behaviours and promoting gender equity and equality.

Article 6: Suppression of the exploitation of women

Trafficking in women and girls

45. The Government of Benin is making significant efforts to combat trafficking in persons, particularly in women and girls.

46. In recent years, the Government has increased its efforts to prosecute and convict more traffickers, identify more trafficked children and establish procedures for the formal identification and care of sexually abused and trafficked children.

47. The Government has implemented airport screening procedures to identify adult victims and potential victims of trafficking who are travelling abroad. It has also strengthened cooperation with neighbouring countries in combating transnational trafficking in adults. In May 2017, 14 Beninese women who were on route to the Middle East, where they were at risk of being trafficked, were intercepted and arrangements were made to facilitate their return to their families.

48. Trafficking in persons is prohibited under articles 499 et seq. of the Criminal Code. However, a new law against trafficking in persons is in the process of being adopted.

49. In 2017, the Central Bureau for the Protection of Minors and Families and the Prevention of Human Trafficking investigated 30 suspected human traffickers, while in 2016 48 cases of child abuse were investigated involving 66 suspects. Six of the 14 trial courts reported that they had prosecuted and convicted 13 child traffickers in 2017, while in 2016 it was reported that five traffickers were prosecuted and no convictions were handed down.

50. The various convictions included those of three perpetrators of child trafficking for sexual exploitation, four for illegal displacement of minors and six for child trafficking under Act No. 2006-04 on conditions for the movement of minors and the suppression of child trafficking.

51. In April 2017, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance, in partnership with an international organization, trained 23 magistrates, 17 border agents, 8 judicial police officers and 2 State agents on migrant smuggling, human trafficking, identity and victim protection.

52. In September 2017, the Government set up an interministerial committee to coordinate efforts to combat trafficking in persons in Benin. The committee, chaired by the Chef de Cabinet of the Minister of Planning and Development, is composed of representatives of sectoral ministries involved in combating the phenomenon, as well as technical and financial partners.

53. In October 2017, the Ministry of Justice and Legislation organized a training session on combating trafficking in persons aimed at heads of unit from the Joint Container Control Unit of the Port of Cotonou, the maritime gendarmerie, the gendarmerie's research unit, the Central Office to Combat Illicit Traffic in Drugs and Precursors, customs, water and forestry agents and the airport anti-trafficking unit.

54. In November 2017, the Government funded a workshop that brought together law enforcement authorities, non-governmental organizations and representatives of ministries and international organizations on the same theme.

55. In November 2017, the Government launched the Population Identification Census, through which the data of all Beninese citizens from birth were collected to create a digital database and issue biometric identity cards. The initiative is aimed at reducing the vulnerability of Beninese citizens to trafficking.

56. In January 2018, the Beninese authorities identified and detained two foreign women who were travelling under potentially exploitative conditions. With the approval of their embassies, the two women were safely repatriated to their country.

Combating procuring (exploitation of prostitution)

57. In Benin, the exploitation of prostitution, procuring and other activities that offend public decency are punishable by law, and a special brigade has been established to address them.

58. The Public Decency Unit operates under the supervision of the Directorate of Judicial Police. It conducts investigations into all sexual offences, offences of outraging public decency and indecent acts, cases of rape, incest, exploitation of prostitution and all obscene publications, including on social media.

59. Since 2014, cases of exploitation of prostitution have been handled by the Unit and transmitted to the State prosecutor, who takes over the subsequent court proceedings.

Articles 7 and 8: Participation in public and political life and in international decision-making bodies

60. Women account for 51.3 per cent of the population of Benin. However, they are poorly represented in public and political institutions and in decision-making bodies.

Equality in political and public life at the national level

Beninese women and the right to vote

61. Benin is a party to the solemn declaration of the African Heads of State on equality between men and women, which enshrines the principle of parity.

62. The various electoral laws make no distinction between men and women with regard to the conditions for enjoying and exercising the right to vote and the right to be elected in all national elections (presidential, legislative, communal and local).

63. The persistence of stereotypes and illiteracy among women have resulted in political parties giving them limited space in decision-making bodies and on candidate lists.

64. Thus, few women are elected in national elections. There were two women candidates in the last presidential election, held in 2016, and only one in 2011.

65. In the current legislature (2015 to 2019), out of the 83 deputies elected to the National Assembly, only 7 are women, a rate of 8.43 per cent. In the previous legislature (2011 to 2015), out of 83 deputies only 8 were women, a rate of 9.63 per cent. The representation of women in the legislative branch is low despite the tireless efforts made by the Government and civil society organizations.

66. At the communal level, Benin currently has three women elected mayors (communes of Ouidah, Pèrèrè and Toffo).

Beninese women in the civil service and in decision-making bodies

67. In Benin, gender inequality with regard to participation in the decision-making process persists and is characterized by poor representation of women in the public service and institutions of the Republic.

68. Only 4 out of 22 ministerial positions are held by women; 7 diplomatic and consular missions out of a total of 33 are headed by women; one woman is president of an institution, compared with five men who hold the same position; out of 11 members of the Benin Human Rights Commission, only 3 are women commissioners; and one woman has been elected as judge of the International Criminal Court.

69. The low representation led the National Assembly of Benin to organize a conference on the issue, held on 18 January 2018. This was the second time that parliamentarians have addressed the issue of women's representation within the institution. Several changes to the electoral law were envisaged at the end of the conference with a view to improving women's representation in parliament.

Current status

Table 1. Gender distribution in leadership positions (Government, parliament, constitutional court, local elected officials)

Mandate	Men	Women	Total	% women	Positions held by women
Government					
2010–2010	26	4	30	13.33	

<i>Mandate</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% women</i>	<i>Positions held by women</i>
2011–2012	22	8	30	30.76	Ministries in charge of health, finance, public service, industry, micro-finance, justice, family, relations with institutions, etc.
2013–2014	21	6	27	22.22	
<i>Constitutional court</i>					
2003–2008	5	2	7	28.57	President and Councillor
2008–2013	5	2	7	28.57	Vice-President and Councillor
2013–2018	5	2	7	28.57	
<i>National Assembly</i>					
2003–2007	77	6	83	7.23	
2007–2011	74	9	83	10.84	
2011–2016	76	7	83	8.43	First General Secretary of the Office of the National Assembly President of the Law Commission
<i>Local elected official</i>					
2003–2008	124 273	4 504	128 777	3.2	Communal councillors, mayors
2008–2013	137 576	651	143 577	4.52	Communal councillors, mayors

Table 2: Gender distribution of officers in decision-making positions within ministries

<i>Structures</i>	<i>Ministerial offices</i>		<i>General secretary positions</i>		<i>Directors</i>		<i>Deputy directors</i>		<i>Heads of services</i>	
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M
	36	110	8	24	66	182	34	38	100	117
Total	146	32	248	72	217					

Table 3: Gender distribution of officials in decision-making positions by category of Permanent State Agent.

<i>Categories</i>	<i>A</i>		<i>B</i>		<i>C</i>		<i>D</i>		<i>E</i>	
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M
	552	2 032	574	1 869	476	1 398	166	622	36	139
Total	2 584	2 443	1 874	788	217					

70. Data disaggregated by sex indicate that the percentage of men (81.46 per cent) appointed to management positions in the public administration is much higher than that of women (18.54 per cent). This trend is more balanced at the level of service managers (40.13 per cent compared with 59.83 per cent). The synthesis and analysis of statistical data collected from the various ministerial departments show a fluctuating trend in the proportion of women in decision-making bodies.

71. Given this low representation of women, a bill on equal access of men and women to elective and administrative positions was presented for consideration in the National Assembly in 2012, but a positive response has not yet been received.

72. Given these various challenges, UNDP has continued to provide technical and financial assistance to networks of women leaders, which have contributed to the following:

- Establishment of the Compendium of Women's Competencies of Benin, a network of influence, lobbying and advocacy for the promotion of women in decision-making bodies at the national and local levels
- Creation of a website (www.femmescompetentes.bj) containing a database of women leaders that will be made available to political and administrative officials and political parties with a view to increasing the number of women in decision-making bodies.
- Development of a project to support national advocacy, which is being discussed with the aim of mobilizing technical and financial partners around national advocacy efforts on a bill to promote equal access of women and men to elective and administrative positions.

73. Women's capacity-building actions are being carried out by civil society organizations with financial support from UNDP and other technical and financial partners. Similarly, awareness-raising sessions are organized for men, spouses of potential women candidates, religious leaders and opinion leaders.

Article 9: Right to acquire, change and retain nationality

74. Benin has drafted a new nationality code, which is under consideration by the National Assembly, with a view to eliminating the gender-based discrimination with regard to nationality identified by the Constitutional Court as present in Act No. 65-17 of 23 June 1965, the code on Dahomean nationality.

75. This gender-based discrimination does not concern the acquisition of nationality by women, but rather their ability, as a mother or wife, to transmit their nationality, on the same basis as men, to children born of a foreign father or to their foreign husband.

76. With regard to motherhood, article 8 of Act No. 65-17 provides that children born in Benin of a mother who was herself born in Benin, who have inherited Beninese nationality from their mother, may renounce Beninese nationality; however, under article 7 of the same Act, children born of a Beninese father in the same circumstances do not have this option. Given that nationality is not merely a right but an invaluable service that a sovereign State may offer to an individual, such a difference in treatment between the child born of a Beninese mother and the child born of a Beninese father as described above diminishes the power of women to transmit their nationality permanently and irreversibly, compared to men.

77. The difference in treatment is starker when it comes to married women: while article 18 of Act No. 65-17 provides that a foreign woman married to a Beninese man may acquire Beninese nationality, there are no provisions allowing for a foreign man married to a Beninese woman to acquire Beninese nationality.

78. In Constitutional Court Decision No. 14-172 of 16 September 2014, the Constitutional Court ruled on the constitutionality of articles 8, 12 (2), 13 and 18 of Act No. 65-17. According to the Court, the articles in question introduce, without justification, distinctions in the attribution or acquisition of Beninese nationality based either on birth in Benin, or on relationship by descent or marriage. Accordingly, they are discriminatory in that they infringe on the principle of equality between men and women.

Article 10: Equal rights to education and vocational training

79. The Beninese formal education system consists of four main cycles: nursery, primary, secondary (general and technical) and higher education. Over the reporting period, the following progress was made:

Primary education

80. The following actions were taken:

- The policy of setting up school canteens in elementary schools was expanded. Out of a total 8,169 elementary schools, 2,566, or 31 per cent, were provided with school canteens between 2015 and 2016. By early 2021, the Government plans to increase this number to 4,166, a coverage rate of 51 per cent. This measure supports the retention of learners in general, and girls in particular.
- The Government has increased provision by building school infrastructure and recruiting and training teachers.

General secondary education

81. The Government has improved the education on offer by building school infrastructure and recruiting and training teachers.

Technical and vocational education

82. The action taken during the period can be summed up as a renewal of interest in technical education and vocational training.

83. The Government has established new agricultural and industrial technical secondary schools, and provided them with equipment and staff. Incentives have also been introduced to encourage learners; these include prizes for the best students and scholarships for deserving girls.

83*. Technical education and vocational training are taken into account in the post-2015 education sector plan. The main purpose of this plan is to develop the functional and generic skills required by the labour market and facilitate learners' employment.

84. There are seven different programmes:

- Industrial science and technology
- Administration and management
- Agricultural science and technology
- Family and social education studies
- Artistic professions training
- Medical and social science and technology
- Applied social science, tourism and hotel management

Higher education

85. Pursuant to a resolution adopted by the African and Malagasy Council on Higher Education in 2006 and Directive No. 03/2007/CM/UEMOA of 4 July 2007 on the adoption of the Bachelor-Master-Doctorate academic model by the universities and higher education institutions of the West African Economic and Monetary Union,

* *Translator's note:* paragraph number given twice in the original French text.

Benin has begun to reorganize its university system and reconfigure curricula to conform to the community-wide standard. The Government has streamlined higher education establishments, changing the structure of the university system. The number of public universities was reduced from seven in 2015/16 to four at the beginning of the 2016/17 academic year, to ensure the rational and efficient management of available resources and the provision of high-quality education.

86. Further reforms have made it possible to approve several training programmes run by private higher education institutions.

87. An approved list of private universities has been drawn up and published.

88. These reforms have made it easier for women to access higher education.

Table 11: Number of institutions in terms of status from 2009/10 to 2015/16

<i>Academic year</i>	<i>2009/2010</i>	<i>2010/2011</i>	<i>2011/2012</i>	<i>2012/2013</i>	<i>2013/2014</i>	<i>2014/2015</i>	<i>2015/2016</i>
Public universities	2	2	2	2	4	4	7
Private universities	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
Public university institutions	33	37	38	39	58	58	58
Private university institutions	35	35	35	35	36	36	36
Private higher education centres	64	69	74	82	88	93	93
Private university institutions and private higher education centres	99	104	109	117	124	129	129

Sources: Directorate of Examinations and Competitions, 2016, and Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2016.

89. The commitment of Benin to making education accessible for all is gradually being fulfilled. Accordingly, the policy of free schooling for girls in public primary schools continues. In 2012, the policy was extended to girls in their first year at public secondary schools and by 2015 it covered girls in their fourth year. With regard to technical education and vocational training, the State grants a 50 per cent reduction in school fees for girls in the industrial science and technology stream. These efforts have resulted in an increase in the number of girls in school. This improvement in general secondary education between 2011 and 2015 is shown in the table below:

Change in the number of girls in public general secondary schools

<i>Academic year</i>	<i>2011/2012</i>	<i>2012/2013</i>	<i>2013/2014</i>	<i>2014/2015</i>
Number	241 519	268 975	301 814	321 199
Gender parity rate	0.59	0.62	0.65	0.67
Growth rate	–	11.4%	12.2%	6.4%

Source: Office of Programme and Planning for Secondary Education, 2016.

90. In addition, the reform of the Beninese education system is ongoing, on the basis of the États-généraux de l'éducation of December 2014 and the principal development documents of Benin (including the national development plan 2018–2025 and the

government action programme 2016–2021), as well as the country’s international commitments related to education.

91. These commitments are reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 4, on achieving equitable access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. The reform has led to:

- The adoption, and implementation, beginning in 2006, of the ten-year development plan for the education sector, which ended in 2015.
- The Government’s adoption, on 13 June 2018, of the post-2015 education sector plan.

92. One of the four thematic goals of the national development plan 2018–2025 is to enable all Beninese men and women to thrive, be in good health, and be competent and competitive in order to meet the requirements of sustainable development, good governance and collective well-being.

With regard to non-formal education and literacy

93. A programme for non-formal education and literacy has been designed and rolled out.

94. The Beninese Government is planning to reduce the rate of illiteracy among the out-of-school population aged 15 and over by 20 per cent by 2025. To that end, the following regulations have been adopted:

- Order No. 2015-215/MCAT of 4 May 2015, establishing a literacy and adult education programme.
- An Order on quality standards for literacy and adult education.
- An Order establishing a mechanism for the monitoring and evaluation of literacy and adult education activities.

Article 11: Equal access to work

95. Pursuant to article 30 of the Constitution of Benin, the State recognizes that all persons have the right to work, endeavours to create conditions conducive to the effective enjoyment of this right and seeks to ensure that workers receive fair remuneration for their services or for what they produce.

96. Other laws in force grant specific rights to breastfeeding and pregnant women.

97. A number of national and sectoral policy documents and strategies have an emphasis on valuing women’s work, promoting gender equality and empowering women economically.

98. The need to take cross-cutting issues, including gender, into account in employment programmes figures prominently among the 51 measures provided for in the national employment policy 2011–2015.

Article 12: Equality in health care

99. Benin adopted a national health policy document in 2008 and a national health development plan for the period 2009–2018, together with three-year development plans for its implementation. The national health development plan covers five strategic areas incorporating programmes and subprogrammes. The health sector now

has a new national health development plan that covers the period 2018–2022 and includes new government reforms.

100. The sector has also adopted the following policy documents, strategies and plans:

- National strategic plan for human resources development (2009–2018)
- National community health policy
- National policy on quality assurance in health care and health services in Benin
- Master plan for the pharmaceutical subsector of Benin (2013–2017)
- National health financing strategy
- National strategy for the reduction of maternal and infant mortality (2009–2018)
- National strategic plan on combating HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (2015–2017)
- National strategic plan on combating tuberculosis (2015–2019)
- National strategic plan on combating malaria (2011–2015, extended to 2018)
- Integrated strategic plan on combating non-communicable diseases (2014–2018)
- Strategic plan for integrated disease monitoring and response and the International Health Regulations
- Comprehensive Multi-Year Plan under the Expanded Programme on Immunization (2014–18)

101. As in other domains, there are inequalities between men and women in the areas of health and health-care access.

102. These inequalities are explained by the fact that men and women are not exposed to the same health risks and are not offered the same care services. They also do not have the same health-care-seeking behaviours or the same health outcomes.

103. Through a survey and focus groups, a sample of more than 500 managers, health workers at various levels of the health pyramid, and partners and clients of the Ministry of Health took part in the participatory gender audit conducted in 2014. Through the audit, it has been possible to measure the degree to which gender-related considerations are taken into account in all parts of the health system and at all levels of the pyramid.

104. The areas of health care most affected by gender inequalities in Benin are: (i) access to health services; (ii) birth control and reproductive health; (iii) HIV/AIDS; and (iv) malaria.

Access to health services

105. According to the 2017 Health Statistics Yearbook, the rate of utilization of health services is low (47.6 per cent). Women's access to primary health care is limited by socioeconomic constraints.

Birth control

106. The use of family planning and contraceptives remains limited. Only 8 per cent of women in relationships use a modern method of contraception. This explains the fertility rate in Benin, which remains high. The total fertility rate is estimated at 5.7 children per woman, according to the results of the 2017–2018 Demographic and Health Survey of Benin.

Reproductive health

107. According to the 2011–2012 Demographic and Health Survey of Benin, 86 per cent of mothers had a prenatal visit and 87 per cent of births were attended by skilled personnel. However, only 51 per cent of women received postnatal care within two days of delivery and 32 per cent did not receive postnatal care within 41 days of delivery. Moreover, the persistence of recurrent pregnancies and closely spaced or unwanted births continues to lead to a high mortality rate for mothers (370 per 100,000 live births in 2010, compared with 335.5 in 2013, according to the fourth General Population and Housing Census) and for children (95.7 per 1,000 children under age 5, according to World Bank data, compared with 63.1 per 1,000 children, according to the fourth General Population and Housing Census). That situation is exacerbated by cultural perceptions that lead to the refusal of caesarean sections and deprivation of certain essential nutrients during pregnancy.

HIV/AIDS

108. According to the 2017 Statistical Yearbook of the Ministry of Health, the rate of prevalence of HIV infection in the adult population (aged 15–49) is estimated at 1.55 per cent. The rate was 1.22 per cent in 2012, with a higher infection rate among women (1.4 per cent compared with 1 per cent for men), reflecting the feminization of the epidemic (fourth Demographic and Health Survey of Benin).

109. Lastly, the stigmatization of HIV-positive women has decreased.

Malaria

110. Malaria remains the first cause of consultation and death in health units, with children under age 5 accounting for more than 40 per cent of the cases recorded by health centres. Small children also account for the vast majority of deaths (nearly 75 per cent).

111. Results of microscopic examinations show that the rate of prevalence of malaria among children under age 5 is 37 per cent. The rate is higher in rural areas than in urban areas (42 per cent compared with 31 per cent), according to the fifth Demographic and Health Survey.

112. The proportion of girls with malaria is slightly lower than that of boys (24 per cent versus 26 per cent), according to the fourth Demographic and Health Survey.

Article 13: Economic and social life of women**Financial inclusion of women**

113. The Government continued to implement the latest version of its “Microcredit for the poorest” programme. The base amount was increased from 30,000 CFA francs to 50,000 CFA francs.

114. Most of the beneficiaries of this fund are women. The programme has led to a reduction in monetary poverty, particularly among women, with an increase in their income-generating activities. The table below shows the poverty rate by sex of head of household.

Poverty rate by sex of head of household

	2011		2015	
	<i>Rate of monetary poverty</i>	<i>Rate of non-monetary poverty</i>	<i>Rate of monetary poverty</i>	<i>Rate of non-monetary poverty</i>
	<i>P0 (percentage)</i>	<i>P0 (percentage)</i>	<i>P0 (percentage)</i>	<i>P0 (percentage)</i>
Man	38.0	28.2	40.2	27.1
Woman	27.6	39.9	39.7	36.3
Overall	36.2	30.2	40.1	28.7

Source: 2011 and 2015 Integrated Modular Surveys on Household Living Conditions.

115. The latest version of the “Microcredit for the poorest” programme was officially launched on 29 June 2017 at the Abomey youth centre (department of Zou). The initiative falls within the scope of the third pillar of the Government Action Programme and is aimed at empowering women and underprivileged people through economic growth and poverty reduction.

116. The Government has provided a total of 1 billion CFA francs to decentralized financial systems in order to finance the “Microcredit for the poorest” programme.

117. Local agricultural and mutual credit unions support women’s cooperatives and associations by granting them loan facilities.

118. In addition, the traditional savings practice known as tontine also contributes to reducing monetary poverty among rural women.

119. There nevertheless remain many challenges relating to women’s ignorance of procedures for obtaining funding, especially in rural areas, and a lack of support.

Empowerment of women

120. Efforts to promote women’s empowerment are based on a number of strategy documents, including:

- National long-term outlook studies (Benin-Alafia, 2025) in which the following vision is set forth: “In 2025, Benin will be an exemplary, well-governed, united and peaceful country with a prosperous and competitive economy, cultural influence and social harmony”.
- Action plan under the national policy for the promotion of gender equality: the first component of the action plan, relating to women’s economic empowerment, is aimed at empowering women through capacity-building, strengthening efforts to incorporate gender-related considerations into communal development programmes, ensuring equitable access to and control of productive resources, and enhancing men’s and women’s resource management capacities.
- 2011–2015 Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy, aimed at achieving gender equity and equality.

121. Through the implementation of these strategies, it has been possible to introduce reforms in the microfinance sector and to provide training to actors involved in income-generating activities relating to management, leadership and entrepreneurship.

122. The Land (Private and State-owned) Code recognizes the right of women to gain access to land and factors of production on an equal basis with men.

123. Benin has also followed the integrated water resources management approach, which promotes the coordinated development of water, land and related resources in order to maximize economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without undermining the sustainability of vital ecosystems.

Article 14: Rights of rural women

Women and poverty

124. The Government and its technical and financial partners have made combating poverty in rural areas a national priority. In general, women are involved in many activities, but the challenges they face limit their production potential in both rural and urban areas. Very few women are entrepreneurs.

125. Examples of steps taken during the reporting period are as follows:

- Increasing of the amount of microcredit granted to the poorest individuals, particularly women
- Strengthening of rural women's credit management capacities
- Provision of equipment to women's groups for the processing of agricultural products
- Provision of technical support to groups of rural women and young girl artisans

126. Technical and financial partners have supported the economic empowerment of a number of women through the implementation of various projects, including the Project to Support Decentralization, Devolution and Local Economic Development, the Women's Centre for Applied Arts and Crafts, the Millennium Village project and the Women Business Promotion Centre. These projects are aimed at improving the employment qualifications of women and vulnerable people.

127. One of the best examples of such initiatives is the Women's Centre for Applied Arts and Crafts of Parakou, in which out-of-school and young adult women receive training in local production systems. The Centre also helps beneficiaries to acquire appropriate resources to finance their projects. Another key initiative to promote women's economic empowerment is the Women Business Promotion Centre, whose purpose is to strengthen the managerial capacities of businesswomen and women entrepreneurs by enabling them to carry out their business plans and gain easier access to financial and microcredit institutions. In 2013, UNDP, through the Project to Support Decentralization, Devolution and Local Economic Development, enabled 78 per cent of households in the project area to have food to cover the lean season, thereby ensuring the food security of the population.

128. In order to mainstream support for vulnerable groups, particularly women, UNDP also assisted the Government in developing a gender and social protection-sensitive programme budget by helping personnel from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance and the Ministry for the Promotion of Gender Equality to integrate a gender perspective into the State budget.

129. The Government also: (i) mainstreamed gender into the 2013 economic guidance note and the 2014 budget guidelines; (ii) strengthened the capacities of gender focal points and monitoring and evaluation units in various sectoral ministries; (iii) conducted a gender-sensitivity assessment in some sectoral ministries; and (iv) approved, in November 2017, a road map for the implementation of gender-sensitive budgeting in Benin.

Women and land

130. Women in Benin face clear disadvantages in gaining access to land. It is possible to obtain access to land through inheritance, purchase, donation, lease and borrowing. Because women, unlike their husbands and older relatives, are excluded from inheriting land and lack adequate financial resources, they have very limited access to land.

131. To correct that situation, Benin adopted Act No. 2017-15 of 10 August 2017 amending and supplementing Act No. 2013-01 of 14 August 2016 establishing the Land (Private and State-owned) Code in the Republic of Benin, whose article 6 provides that the Government and local authorities, as guarantors of the public interest, must:

- Ensure equitable access to land for all actors, natural persons and public and private entities
- Ensure respect for the equal access of men and women to land

132. The use of this provision should eventually facilitate women's access to land.

Article 15: Equality before the law

133. Women, like men, can freely initiate legal proceedings and have their cases heard by a judge, regardless of subject matter or location.

134. Benin has 14 courts of first instance, a commercial court, 3 courts of appeal and a supreme court.

135. Women, like other categories of vulnerable people, receive support from social workers and associations of lawyers and legal experts before the courts.

136. Non-governmental organizations and networks such as the Association of Women Legal Experts of Benin, the Association of Women Lawyers of Benin and Réseau femmes droit et développement en Afrique (Network of Women in Law and Development in Africa) (WILDAF-Benin) also provide free legal aid services. Despite this progress, women must be provided with better legal and judicial protection.

137. A proposal for a legal aid mechanism and a legal aid policy document are therefore being developed.

Article 16: Marriage and family life

Marriage rights

The legal framework on marriage did not change during the reporting period.

Protection of the family

138. From 2013 to 2017, the Government of Benin carried out a number of projects and programmes aimed at protecting the family, women and children. These initiatives included:

- A project focused on women's economic empowerment and the promotion of gender equality
- A programme aimed at protecting vulnerable people

- The Insurance for the Strengthening of Human Capital project under the 2016-2021 Government Action Programme, a project that is in its initial phase

Conclusion

139. During the reporting period, the normative and institutional framework was strengthened in order to reduce gender inequality and implement the provisions of the Convention.

140. In that regard, there has been an improvement in the legal status of women in recent years. Such efforts have led to the enhancement of women's living conditions in various socioeconomic domains, particularly education, health, access to rural land and access to credit, made possible by the development of microfinance.

141. There is also increasing public awareness of sexual violence, including female genital mutilation.

142. Civil society actors and technical and financial partners continue to lobby for the adoption of a law promoting the equal access of men and women to elected and appointed positions.

143. The current Criminal Code represents a step forward in the punishment of certain forms of violence against women.

144. The elimination of all forms of discrimination against women nevertheless remains a challenge, as certain sociocultural realities confine women to the roles of daughter, wife and mother.

145. The Government, in collaboration with civil society and with the technical and financial support of development partners, must give priority to projects and programmes aimed at raising public awareness regarding women's rights and at disseminating new laws.
