



Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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Consideration of reports submitted by parties to
the Convention under article 35

Replies of Maldives to the list of issues in relation to its initial report*

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



I. Purpose and general obligations (arts. 1 to 4)

Reply to paragraph 1 of the list of issues (CRPD/C/MDV/Q/1)

1. Following ratification of Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (“CRPD”) in 2010, Maldives enacted Law No: 08/2010 (Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Provision of Financial Assistance Act) (“Disability Act”) in 2010. Nevertheless, Persons with Disabilities (“PWDs”) continue to face challenges in the health, education and employment sectors. Government is committed to removing these barriers and in that regard, substantial efforts have been made by this administration.
2. Progress made in the education sector include: enacting the first Inclusive Education (“IE”) Policy in 2013; enrolling the National Curriculum Framework (“NCF”) with a dedicated principle based on IE and including IE in main elements of NCF; establishing the Department of Inclusive Education (“DOIE”) in 2018 under the Ministry of Education (“MOE”) with a broad mandate to upscale IE practices in all schools of Maldives; enacting Law No: 24/2020 (Education Act) in 2020; and revising the IE Policy in 2021 with nine principles to accelerate current IE practices. Higher Education Loan Schemes also have specific quotas allocated for PWDs. At the Maldives National University, special arrangements are in place to ensure access to facilities and education for PWDs.
3. Further, Regulation No: 2014/R-311 (Civil Service Regulation) states that, no person shall be discriminated against, in recruitment, training, or in the provision of other benefits. The Civil Service Commission has developed a regulation that creates equal opportunities for PWDs within the civil service. Furthermore, efforts are underway to align profiles of PWDs to job demands. The Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services (“MOGFSS”) is working with State owned entities to increase employment opportunities and reduce discrimination faced by PWDs within the job market. As a result, total of 315 PWDs have been employed within 17 State owned entities.
4. The health service structure in Maldives ensures access to essential health services for everyone, including PWDs. As health equity and accessibility are key policies of the Government, considerable investments have been made in health infrastructure and services, including increasing accessibility to health services, i.e., installing ramps at health facilities; ensuring availability of therapeutic services such as physiotherapy at all atoll-level hospitals; and ensuring availability of speech and occupational health services at regional and tertiary-level facilities.
5. Furthermore, Ministry of Health (“MOH”) prioritizes revitalizing primary health care across the country, whereby, frontline health workers in the fields of clinical, public health and administrative sectors, use a team-based approach rather than working in silos to proactively prevent, inform, educate, promote and clinically intervene. This policy is also aligned with the initiative ‘*Ijthimaae Badhahi Madhadhuverin*’ (“IBAMA” – You and Me), a multi-sectoral support mechanism formed at community-level in all inhabited islands and administered by MOGFSS, to improve monitoring and coordination of resources between relevant stakeholders.
6. Another policy that runs parallel to decentralisation is health sector digitalisation, which includes, introducing inter-operable systems, record sharing, registries of conditions and diseases, statistics and real time dashboards that will inform policies and service development across the Maldives.
7. The Health Protection Agency has updated the growth-monitoring book with additional educational information for monitoring childhood development milestones, to help parents and health care workers to identify developmental delays and ensure early intervention.
8. Nevertheless, availability of rehabilitation services and therapeutic programmes are limited and expensive, burdening parents and caregivers. As a measure to counter this, therapeutic treatment for children and PWDs are now covered under *Aasandha* (National Health Insurance Scheme) since 2019, increasing affordability of therapeutic services and number of service providers over the past four years.

9. Law No: 19/2019 (Child Rights Protection Act) (“CRPA”) was enacted in 2019, stipulating that all children shall be protected from all forms of discrimination, mental and physical harm, exploitation and factors that may be harmful to their wellbeing, and affords special protection to children with special needs. CRPA also established the Council for Protecting the Rights of the Child, comprising of multi-sectoral representation,

10. While Article 17(a) of the Constitution stipulates that everyone is entitled to the rights and freedoms included in Chapter 2 of the Constitution without discrimination of any kind, including mental or physical disability, Article 17(b) specifically states that special assistance or protection to disadvantaged individuals or groups requiring special social assistance, as provided in law, shall not be deemed to be discrimination as provided for in Article 17(a).

Reply to paragraph 2 of the list of issues

11. MOGFSS is mandated to provide social protection services to all vulnerable groups including PWDs, and is subject to oversight by the Human Rights and Gender Committee of the Parliament. MOGFSS has a child helpline number 1412 designated to report child related cases and a separate hotline number 1421 to report any adult related cases.

12. Law No: 7/2010 (Decentralization Act) mandates island councils to play a significant role in supporting the delivery of social services. MOGFSS with support from UNICEF, is working on decentralizing delivery of social services and is training multisectoral teams to support local councils in building their capacity to provide social services at local level.

13. IBAMA focuses on providing protection for vulnerable children, elderly, PWDs, women and men in the community, and preventing and responding to violence. Additionally, relevant authorities such as the MOGFSS, local councils, MOE, MOH, Maldives Police Service (“MPS”), Department of Juvenile Justice, and Women’s Development Committees (“WDCs”) of local councils, work together holistically as a cohesive group, to provide community support.

14. Social protection programmes offering financial aid and services to PWDs began in 2010 with the enactment of the Disability Act. Although it provided monthly financial assistance at first, the programme has expanded to provide financial assistance to procure assistive devices, psychological profiling, therapeutic services and assistance to those living under poverty line. Government is pleased to report that for the first time in Maldives, proper systematic registration of PWDs has begun with the launch of the National Disability Registry (“NDR”) in January 2023. This will streamline efforts to identify all PWDs and provide them with the required services.

15. Community Based Rehabilitation (“CBR”) programme launched in 2021 by MOGFSS has helped to decentralise and increase accessibility to rehabilitation services and other targeted services across the country, ensuring equal opportunities of education, empowerment, employment, trainings and social inclusion for all PWDs in the community. Currently, CBR trainings are on-going for IBAMA members, along with PWDs, their parents and Civil Society Organizations (“CSOs”).

16. Government affords high priority to ensure that PWDs and their representative organizations participate in the development of the laws, policies and programmes on issues that concern them. To this end, the National Disability Council was constituted under the Disability Act which comprises of a member elected from PWDs, a member elected from parents of PWDs and a member elected from the representing PWDs. All laws, policies or issues concerning PWDs need to be validated by this Council.

17. Furthermore, specific committees were established within the Parliament, to promote participation of PWDs in the legislative process, which includes reviewing bills and declarations relating to PWDs. PWDs and organisation representing them were also consulted in the formulation of the Government’s Strategic Action Plan 2019–2023 (“SAP”), and in revising the IE Policy in 2021. A representative from PWDs also sit on the technical committee of DOIE.

II. Specific Rights (arts. 5 – 30)

Equality and non-discrimination (art. 5)

Reply to paragraph 3 of the list of issues

18. The Constitution is founded on the fundamental principle of ‘equality for all’ and Article 20 stipulates that every individual is equal before and under the law, and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law.

19. These are further reinforced within legislations, such as Disability Act, which prohibits any form of discrimination based on disability and guarantees the rights afforded to PWDs. Discrimination against PWDs in relation to specific issues have been prohibited through relevant laws in the Maldives, such as Law No: 1/2013 (Freedom of Peaceful Assembly Act), Law No: 13/2013 (Anti-Torture Act), Law No: 29/2015 (Health Service Provision Act), Law No: 30/2015 (Maldives Sports Act), Law No: 12/2016 (Criminal Procedure Act), Law No: 18/2019 (Juvenile Justice Act), CRPA, Law No: 8/2020 (Water and Sewerage Act), Education Act and Law No: 32/2021 (Civil Procedure Act).

20. Discrimination in relation to employment is prohibited in Law No: 2/2008 (Employment Act). The law however, also states that the implementation of any principles, activities or programmes with the objective of assisting the disadvantaged (which includes disability) or socially disadvantaged persons shall not be deemed as discrimination among equal employees. Additionally, Law No: 21/2021 (Tenancy Act) prohibits inclusion of a clause in a tenancy agreement which prohibits residence of a person with disability in the property being let out.

21. PWDs facing discrimination have remedies through the Employment Tribunal of Maldives, for workplace discrimination, as well as through the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (“HRCM”) for all human rights violations. The Disability Council is also mandated to investigate any cases of discrimination lodged.

22. The Disability Act imposes fines for violations of the Act, and increased fines for repeated offenses. Furthermore, Law No: 9/2014 (Penal Code of the Maldives) allows for baseline sentences to be aggravated at least by one level, if any of the offences listed in the Act has been committed against a person with a mental or physical disability.

23. With regard to disaggregated data on cases of discrimination against PWDs, the Employment Tribunal maintains records of all such cases lodged at the Tribunal. The HRCM has investigated a total of 30 cases related to PWDs during the period from 2019 – 2022, out of which, 12 cases have been closed by HRCM. MPS also gathers data relating to all known or disclosed victims or suspects with special needs, in the course of investigations.

24. In the education sector, the Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Division (“ESQID”) – a department under MOE – attends to cases related to students at risk, and maintains disaggregated data related to the cases attended annually. While no cases related to discrimination based on disabilities have been lodged at ESQID, they have received 26 cases in 2020, 33 cases in 2021 and 8 cases in 2022 related to several other types of challenges faced by students with disabilities. Support have been provided by ESQID, including conducting case analysis, making necessary interventions, following-up on cases and technical assistance on handling future cases effectively.

25. The MOGFSS’s case coding system collects data on disabled victims, but lacks details like disability type and involvement of discrimination. Work is underway to align the system to the standard classification in Regulation No: 2021/R-54 (Regulation on Identification and Classification of Persons with Disabilities).

26. In 2023, Government proposed a budget allocation for social protection amounting to MVR 3,916,000,000 to effectively combat discrimination against PWDs. Affirmative actions taken include, ensuring availability of essential services for PWDs on every island and mandating accessibility when designing new health facilities and hospitals. Further actions outlined in the SAP include, providing free accessibility to assistive devices and other support

targeting PWDs, ensuring that the media is accessible for PWDs and strengthening the institutional structure for disability relation policy making.

27. HRCM's "Challenges of Wheelchair Accessibility in Greater Malé" survey conducted in 2021 showed that efforts are being made to enhance physical accessibility for PWDs, which include designating parking, widening pavements, and mandating ramps in public service buildings. However, Government recognises that majority of the buildings in Malé are still not accessible to PWDs and that roads are too narrow for wheelchairs, and therefore will continue to take actions to eliminate these obstacles.

Women with disabilities (art. 6)

Reply to paragraph 4 of the list of issues

28. Guidelines on the treaty-specific document to be submitted by State Parties under Article 35 of CRPD lack guidance for Article 6, possibly contributing to the lack of information. Additionally, limited information was available at the time of reporting. However, efforts have been made to ensure and enhance the rights of women and girls with disabilities.

29. The Gender Equality Action Plan 2022 – 2026 ("GEAP") launched in March 2022 is a multisectoral plan designed to address the challenges and ensure gender equality including amongst PWDs. The action plan consists of Government's policies towards the promotion of gender equality and protection of all men, women and children from all forms of discrimination. It also focuses on establishing and expanding career pathways and entrepreneurship opportunities for women with disabilities.

30. Law No: 18/2016 (Gender Equality Act) mandates all the public and private sector employers to establish complaints mechanisms for victims of gender-based discrimination to submit for any non-compliance on the part of the employer. However, till date, no cases of gender-based discrimination have been reported to the respective institutions nor to MOGFSS.

31. The Disability Act affords additional attention and protection to women and girls with disabilities, and also states that children with disabilities must be given the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, with the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.

Children with disabilities (art. 7)

Reply to paragraph 5 of the list of issues

32. Guidelines on the treaty-specific document to be submitted by State Parties under Article 35 of CRPD lack guidance for Article 7, possibly contributing to the lack of information on the Article.

33. The enactment of the CRPA in 2019, which replaces the 1991 law on child rights, marks a significant achievement in addressing gaps and strengthening the child protection system in the Maldives. The Act marks significant changes in the legal protection of children, including children with disabilities. The Children's Ombudsperson's Office ("COO") was established with the responsibility to monitor and enforce measures to ensure all State institutions adhere to the CRPA and the Convention on the Rights of the Child ("CRC"). Furthermore, Child and Family Protection Services ("CFPS") was established under MOGFSS to ensure and promote rights of children including children with disabilities.

34. The National Plan on Violence against Children stated in the Initial Report was published for a two-year period from 2017 to 2019. MOGFSS is working to develop a nationwide plan to complement the new CRPA. CRPA has specific provisions prohibiting all forms of violence against children.

35. As for preventing children with disabilities from being separated from their families, the wellbeing of children under legal guardianship is safeguarded under regulations

governing foster care and the CRPA. CRPA establishes a foster care system for children under State care and introduces safeguards to ensure security. A new regulation was adopted in 2020, which establishes an enhanced mechanism for fostering, with emphasis on the best interest of the child.

36. CRPA also guarantees a child's rights to express their opinion on matters relevant to them. The law emphasizes that authorities should factor in the child's age and changing capabilities when considering the expressed opinion. In cases concerning custody matters and guardianship issues, mechanisms are in place within the CFPS and the Family Court to seek the opinion of the child.

Awareness-raising (art. 8)

Reply to paragraph 6 of the list of issues

37. Stakeholder consultation is a key component of Government policy when developing laws, programmes, and policies. PWDs and organisations representing them were consulted in the development of SAP and other policies relevant to them.

38. As for the health sector, PWDs are included in health screening programmes and health promotion activities. In the education sector, all policies and guidelines finalized at DOIE are formulated by the technical committee, which consists of a member from PWDs. In 2022, consultations were carried out with students with disabilities by DOIE, UNICEF Maldives and CSOs, in initiating a programme to hear student's voices, and further collaboration with CSOs have been planned.

39. MOGFSS holds several activities to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, which are aligned with the specific themes set by the UN for the day. In this regard, the following activities and events were held within the past five-year period.

Year	Activities held
2018	The Vice President and MOGFSS visited selected PWDs and their families, where living conditions and concerns were heard and attended to. A family evening was held open to the public including PWDs and their families, whereby CSOs disseminated information relevant to PWDs. Awareness raising activities targeting children and adults were conducted and a walk was held in each island to create awareness and raise voices of PWDs.
2019	MOGFSS held a two-day exhibition called <i>Riveli Thari</i> , to introduce and promote the skills, creativity and innovations of PWDs. The exhibition aimed to empower PWDs in the community and create opportunities for business expansion.
2020	A nationwide social media campaign named <i>Riveli Aharenge Baiverivun</i> was held. All other activities planned for the year were postponed due to the COVID- 19 pandemic.
2021	Based on the success of <i>Riveli Thari</i> held in 2019, a similar exhibition was held. Additionally, <i>Riveli Awards</i> were awarded to those working for the betterment of PWDs.
2022	The third “ <i>Riveli Thari</i> ” exhibition was held. Additionally, students with disabilities were afforded the chance to spend time and converse with key Ministers of the cabinet, allowing them to raise their concerns and expectations under different sectors.

40. The first Disability Ambassador policy was formulated in 2014, which led to the appointment of the first goodwill ambassadors. The guideline was revised in 2017 before appointing the second group of goodwill ambassadors. With the introduction of IBAMA,

Government observed better outcomes with this approach, compared to appointing individual ambassadors.

Accessibility (art. 9)

Reply to paragraph 7 of the list of issues

41. Government is committed to introducing all necessary measures, to enable and improve accessibility for PWDs and to eliminate the challenges faced in accessing services. The regulation referred to in paragraph 37 of the Initial Report is Regulation No: 2013/R-557 (Regulation on minimum standards in places providing services to persons with disabilities), which was enacted in October 2013. Therefore, the 8-month period stipulated in the Regulation for making buildings compliant with the Regulation ended in June 2014. Hence, the Government, in its initial report, emphasised the need for a greater effort to implement the Regulation.

42. With the enactment of Law No: 4/2017 (Construction Act), and Regulation No: 2019/R-1004 (Administrative Regulation under Construction Act), it is now mandatory for all buildings to be constructed in a manner that ensures accessibility for PWDs.

43. Government has taken various measures to make information accessible, especially those relating to PWDs. To this end, sign language interpretation is provided when broadcasting Parliament meetings and key national events. Sign language interpretation were also utilized for information dissemination during the COVID-19 pandemic, and are now a regular staple in health awareness communication tools. It is also used in some of the justice and legal sector programmes. MPS also has trained personnel in sign language to attend to cases with victims or suspects with special needs.

44. Regulation No: 2019/R-1020 (Building Code) was finalized and published in March 2019. The Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (“MNPFI”) plans to hold stakeholder consultations with CSOs, including those which represent PWDs, to assess the extent of compliance.

45. As stated in the paragraph 41 of the Initial Report, buildings providing public services such as schools and hospitals built prior to the guideline do not have acceptable accessibility options for PWDs. However, MOE is working to finalise an infrastructure code and schools are provided with funds to establish accessible infrastructure and provide assistive learning devices.

46. In order to ensure safety on public transportation, staff of Maldives Transport and Contracting Company Plc (“MTCC”) which operate *Raajje Transport Link* (“RTL”) ferries and buses, are provided with adequate trainings on using wheelchair ramps and attending to PWDs. A call centre has been established with a hotline to attend to customer complaints. Disciplinary actions are taken against employees who do not comply with company regulations and fines are imposed for violations.

47. With regard to ensuring accessibility in island harbours, Government notes that accessibility to modes of land, maritime and air transport are facilitated through the respective laws and special arrangements have been made for embarkation and disembarkation for RTL ferries and buses.

48. Regarding progress made by the State in terms of road improvement, all roads in Villimalé and 6 roads in Malé (with 225 accessibility points) have been modified to meet the standards. Pedestrian pavements of newly developed roads in Malé include features, such as braille blocks for visually impaired and access points for PWDs near road crossings. Pavement corners have been modified to ensure mobility and adequate space for wheelchair access.

Right to life (art. 10)

Reply to paragraph 8 of the list of issues

49. Multiple safeguards exist to ensure that the imposition of the death penalty complies with international human rights law requirements. The Penal Code provides that if a *hudood* or *qisas* offence under Islamic Shariah has been proven beyond all doubt, the penalty afforded to such a crime under Islamic Shariah shall be imposed.

50. In the Maldives, death penalty is only applied for a conviction of murder. The death penalty sentence is subject to automatic appeal and must be confirmed by the Supreme Court. The law affords the President discretion to pardon death sentences within the parameters of Islamic Shariah.

51. Death penalty cannot be abolished in Maldives without preceding domestic legislation and wider public consultation on the issue. Maldives reiterates its commitment to uphold the informal moratorium on the application of death penalty.

Situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies (art. 11)

Reply to paragraph 9 of the list of issues

52. All measures imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic were published and announced through daily media briefings initially held by the National Emergency Operation Centre and later by the Health Emergency Operation Centre, under the MOH. A dedicated website was set up, with daily updates. All the daily media briefings and awareness messages were delivered with sign language interpretation. Additionally, graphics and signboards were heavily utilised to communicate safety and precautionary measures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

53. From the onset of the outbreak, Government took measures to include the most vulnerable population in their communication measures. Access to medical services were ensured for PWDs through online consultations and delivery of medication. PWDs also benefitted from Income Support Allowance provided by the Government to those who had lost their employment or were unable to carry out businesses due to the pandemic.

54. As noted in the Initial Report, the Disabilities Act requires that risk reduction plans in national emergencies and disasters to give special consideration to PWDs and requires the formulation of evacuation and protection plans for PWDs.

Equal recognition before the law (art. 12)

Reply to paragraph 10 of the list of issues

55. As noted above, Article 20 of the Constitution guarantees equality. Furthermore, Regulation No: 2011/R-3 (Regulation under the Disability Act) requires the State to formulate policies to ensure that PWDs enjoys equal and just protection under the law.

56. The Disability Act recognizes the right to legal capacity of PWDs, with provision of any required support mandated. A significant legal reform has been brought to Law No: 11/2008 (Elections (General) Act), which enables visually impaired voters to independently mark their choices on the ballot paper through the use of a designated tactile ballot paper template, thereby ensuring the confidentiality of their votes without the need for external assistance from another individual.

Access to justice (art. 13)

Reply to paragraph 11 of the list of issues

57. While Government has not carried out any measures to repeal Section 62 of the Penal Code, Government will review the section to bring it in line with international best practice.

58. Promoting rule of law and ensuring access to justice for all is a crucial part of the Government's judicial reform agenda. To that end, training programmes were conducted for judges in 2021 and 2022, on fair trial rights in criminal trials, and access to justice for women, children and PWDs. Online panel discussion for judges on access to justice for PWDs were conducted in 2022.

59. Currently, courts offer interpretation services to defendants and witnesses in criminal cases. In civil and family matters, PWDs have to seek such services on their own. As services are mostly readily available in Malé, in cases where courts such as Magistrate Courts request assistance in facilitating interpretation services, the Department of Judicial Administration ("DJA") connects such courts to those with existing services.

60. DJA plans to commence an initiative within the year, aimed at making the judiciary more accessible to PWDs. This includes exploring a feasible approach to offer interpretation services, and developing other programmes to address the hurdles faced by women with disabilities in accessing the justice system. DJA also plans to commence a project which would yield information in formats that could be comprehended by persons with visual and hearing impairments.

61. Despite the efforts, Government acknowledges that much work needs to be done to train judicial officers on the rights of PWDs, specifically the rights of women and children with disabilities. Government also acknowledges the hindrances for PWDs to work as lawyers or judges, but is committed to effect the necessary reforms to counter this, including ensuring merit-based hiring processes with no discrimination.

Liberty and security of the person (art. 14)

Reply to paragraph 12 of the list of issues

62. The current law on health services place strong emphasis on acquiring consent from individuals. Where an individual is incapacitated or is unable to give consent, consent is then acquired from the legal guardian or directive. Therefore, the current legislative mechanisms do not allow forced institutionalizations or treatment under duress for PWDs.

63. MOGFSS has a specific procedure manual and standard operating procedures that are followed when an individual is taken into State care. Legal agreements are made with families of individuals who are required to be institutionalized in the Home for Persons with Special Needs ("HPSN") and high importance is placed to reintegrate them to the community and family. Alternative care guidelines are in place to ensure that those under State care has access to safe, quality and accessible services.

64. The Mental Health Bill is in the formulation phase and is currently being reviewed by a specialised stakeholder committee. Harmonization of the law with CRPD will be prioritized in the review process.

Freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (art. 15)

Reply to paragraph 13 of the list of issues

65. The Constitution stipulates that no person shall be subjected to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, or to torture. Any complaints received by monitoring mechanisms will be investigated and anyone accused of committing such an act will be prosecuted in accordance with the Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Act.

66. The purpose of Article 52 of the Constitution is to prevent relying on confessions obtained outside the court to establish guilt, and to prohibit admission of confessions that may be acquired through acts of torture or coercion. The Criminal Procedure Act not only asserts that confessions are admissible only if it takes place before the judge, but further recognizes the need to determine if confessions are made under any coercion or through unlawful means.

67. With regard to number of complaints of torture, from 1st January 2018 to 25th December 2022, HRCM as the National Preventive Mechanism (“NPM”) received a total of 5 complaints linked to PWDs, which includes 1 case from Maafushi Prison and 4 from HPSN. Allegations of torture were identified in 2 of those cases. 1 case involved alleged torture against a child with an intellectual disability. The investigation was closed in November 2022 due to insufficient evidence of torture. The second case is an alleged case of torture against an elderly person with a physical disability, which is still under investigation.

68. Under the Anti-Torture Act, any person who have been subjected to an act of torture has the right to civil redress, including economical and non-economical compensation as well as litigation costs. Furthermore, the law mandates development of specialized programmes for rehabilitation treatment and education to victims of torture and perpetrators, and work is currently underway.

Freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse (art. 16)

Reply to paragraph 14 of the list of issues

69. HRCM investigates violence and exploitation allegations, performing home and atoll monitoring visits as needed. It regularly monitors homes for the elderly and PWDs, issuing recommendations. HRCM has noted issues such as pension money misuse and coordination issues among enforcement agencies causing investigation delays.

70. With regard to provisions on protection of PWDs in specific laws, Government notes that Law No: 3/2012 (Domestic Violence Prevention Act), detail processes for PWDs to request for protection orders, affording them the opportunity to request for orders themselves or to obtain assistance in cases they are not able to do so. The Penal Code has special provisions relating to both victims and perpetrators who are PWDs. Law No: 12/2013 (Prevention of Human Trafficking Act) has a provision which aggravates the penalty if an offence stated in the Act is committed against a PWD. Law No: 17/2014 (Sexual Offences Act) lists the act of committing a sexual offence against a PWD as a separate offence, with a penalty of 15–20 years’ imprisonment.

71. As for complaints mechanisms under these laws, any criminal offence can be reported to the MPS in accordance with the Criminal Procedure Act. All complaints of human rights violations can be lodged at the HRCM.

72. With regard to complaints under specific laws, no complaints have been received from PWDs so far under the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act. The Prosecutor General’s Office (“PGO”) has recorded 10 cases, from 2015 till date, charged under Section 28 of the Sexual Offences Act, which criminalises committing a non-consensual sexual act against a PWD. While no disaggregated data is available, 4 cases have been submitted under the Domestic Violence Prevention Act, where 1 case has resulted in a conviction and 1 case is still on-going. While PGO currently only records information and data on suspects, efforts are underway to develop a mechanism to collect victim focused data.

73. With regard to protection mechanisms for PWDs living in institutions, Government notes that the law in effect prohibits any form of exploitation, violence and abuse against such persons.

74. The most recent commitment by the Government towards promotion and protection of full enjoyment of rights freedoms by all marginalized women and girls comes from the GEAP, which contains Government’s policies towards protection of all men, women, and children in the society from all forms of discrimination.

75. Government recognises the importance of protecting and supporting women and girls with disabilities facing violence, particularly those reporting sexual violence. Government has implemented mechanisms such as a hotline, to facilitate safe reporting.

76. Training programmes such as the Mental Health Gap and Psychological First-Aid has been conducted by MOH, with the aim to educate healthcare professionals on early identification and intervention. These programmes are targeted towards health care professionals from different levels of health facilities, especially the primary health care level.

MOGFSS, MPS, the Victim Support Unit of PGO, correctional institutions, the National Drug Agency and teaching institutes participated in these trainings. Mental Health Gap training programmes are planned for all six regions of Maldives and to this end, two programmes have been conducted so far and more programmes will be conducted this year.

77. The DOIE also conducts training programmes on rights of PWDs, through which all school principals and leading teachers have been educated on the IE Policy. Furthermore, 6 regional workshops were conducted for leaders representing all the sectors of particular regions such as city council members, island council members, WDCs, CSOs, police, and heads of health facilities to educate them on education related rights of PWDs, elimination of discrimination and development of an inclusive society.

78. MPS includes in its training framework an array of sensitization practices covering human rights principles and laws, including sensitization on the provisions of the Disability Act.

Protecting the integrity of the person (art. 17)

Reply to paragraph 15 of the list of issues

79. The Health Service Provision Act and regulations governing health services, place a significant emphasis on obtaining consent from individuals. Informed and signed consent must be obtained from the patient before any procedure can be performed on them, which serves as the legal authorization. Service providers must ensure that clients have the cognitive capacity or mental faculties to provide informed consent with full understanding. However, under special cases where the client is declared mentally unfit or incapable of providing consent, the legal guardian is mandated by law to provide consent for medical procedures.

Liberty of movement and nationality (art. 18)

Reply to paragraph 16 of the list of issues

80. Article 9(a) of the Constitution states that citizens of Maldives include children born to any citizen of the Maldives and children born to foreigners who, in accordance with the law, become citizens of the Maldives. Furthermore, the CRPA stipulates that upon birth, every child has the right to be registered and given a name acceptable under the law, and that every child born to a Maldivian citizen is a citizen of Maldives and that any child with Maldivian citizenship shall not be deprived of such citizenship.

81. As noted above, the first NDR was compiled and launched in January 2023. The registry currently has a total of 11,048 PWDs registered. A digital portal has been launched to enable easy registration.

The right to live independently and to be included in the community (art. 19)

Reply to paragraph 17 of the list of issues

82. The IBAMA platform along with CBR aim to facilitate PWDs including women and persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities to live independently and to be included in the community. In this regard, a vulnerability mapping exercise is being completed by the IBAMA groups, through which, the needs and situation of PWDs will be identified, which will then be used to address issues and provide assistance.

83. With regard to accessibility to public housing, Government notes there is a specific section in social housing scheme application forms regarding disability, which allows for identification of applicant or dependents of applicants with any disabilities. A high priority is given to allocate units on the ground floor to PWDs, in cases where social housing was provided in buildings with no lifts.

84. As stated above, it is now mandatory for all buildings including public infrastructures to be constructed in a manner that ensures accessibility for PWDs. The law mandates obtaining of approvals for drawings and concepts of the buildings, before undertaking construction.

85. The Housing Development Corporation Ltd (“HDC”), a 100% State owned entity, has developed an Urban Development Planning Framework and an action plan to ensure safe and accessible infrastructure in public places of the greater Malé region, except for Malé City. The policies mandate to provide easy access to PWDs in at least 3–5% of total residential units developed in Hulhumalé.

86. Nevertheless, Government recognises challenges in ensuring compliance with laws due to decentralisation of services, leading to inconsistencies in approvals by city and local councils. Additionally, monitoring compliance by MNPHI is hindered due to staff turnover.

87. With regard to landlord’s hesitance to renting housing to PWDs, as stated above, the Tenancy Act prohibits inclusion of a clause in a tenancy agreement which prohibits residence of a person with disability in the property being let out. Violations of this Act are punishable with fines.

88. Government notes that social housing schemes announced in the recent years has afforded special allocations for PWDs. However, statistics are currently unavailable on a total number of units allocated.

89. With regard to decentralisation, the Decentralisation Act of 2010, contains a provision which prohibits discrimination based on physical or mental disability in administering the Act. The eighth amendment to the Decentralisation Act enacted in December 2019, gives more strength to the local councils, aimed to increase people’s participation in local governance. Public consultations were held in the formulation process of these amendments, both in the capital and in certain islands, which included participation from PWDs and their representative organisations.

Personal mobility (art. 20)

Reply to paragraph 18 of the list of issues

90. Several challenges exist to cater to the demands of technical aid for PWDs. Most of the equipment are imported from abroad and supply of devices are limited in the market. The available equipment is costly and often unavailable across the country due to geographical barriers.

91. The National Social Protection Agency (“NSPA”) is currently working on formulating a National Priority Assistive Product List with assistance from World Health Organisation and other related stakeholders. This list is intended to facilitate accessibility for assistive devices. NSPA provides assistance, including financial assistance to PWDs to procure the assistive devices needed to live an independent life.

92. Doctors and medical professionals provide orientation to those who receive assistive devices through NSPA. Additionally, staff in health facilities are trained on using assistive devices. In order to ensure the quality of devices procured, MOH has developed a minimum specification criterion used by the Government while procuring assistive devices.

Freedom of expression and opinion and access to information (art. 21)

Reply to paragraph 19 of the list of issues

93. As noted above, all measures imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, and safety and precautionary measures were communicated with sign language interpretation, graphics and signboards.

94. During the pandemic, MOGFSS established an emergency helpline for all vulnerable groups including PWDs and all PWDs registered with NSPA were contacted by phone to check their wellbeing and to identify specific needs. Long-term medication, access to health

services, social worker visits and online therapy services were facilitated. A social service map was also formulated and shared with all the local councils.

95. With support from the Global Partnership for Education, and in partnership with UNICEF Maldives, MOE devised an education response plan during the pandemic. Students already had Government issued tablets prior to the pandemic, and MOE introduced *Telekilaas* – classes and educational programming that were broadcasted nation-wide. Government online education platform *Filaa* was particularly useful for the students in accessing digital textbooks, sharing notes, assignments and worksheets.

96. With regard to use of internet to disseminate information on public services, majority of Government agencies have a web presence in the form of a website or social media, where information is provided and is accessible to the public. The National Centre for Information Technology (“NCIT”), as the lead technology agency has established the online website “gov.mv” to act as a single point of access to disseminate Government information to the public. NCIT has also introduced the Digital ID and single sign-in service *eFaas* for online portals that provide public services. While there are no special features inbuilt into the services that cater to PWDs yet, these changes are being explored for future updates of the systems. Government also notes that efforts are being made to provide sign language training to case workers and service providers.

97. The rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and freedom of association are enshrined in the Constitution and are afforded to all persons without discrimination based on any physical or mental disability as per Article 17 of the Constitution. Government has undertaken many efforts during this administration, to ensure a safe space for individuals and CSOs, including PWDs and organisations representing them, to prosper, in a just and democratic society. This also includes ensuring that they are protected from harassment and reprisals by State actors or non-State actors.

Respect for privacy (art. 22)

Reply to paragraph 20 of the list of issues

98. Numerous awareness campaigns were held over the past five years aiming to change attitudes in the community towards inclusion of PWDs, as detailed below:

Year	Activities held
2018	<p>Awareness session on rights was held for 28 individuals with hearing disabilities.</p> <p>Eight-day programme was held targeting individuals with hearing issues to create awareness among them to all forms of violence, reporting and support mechanisms in place.</p> <p>Sensitization session was held for 28 staffs of Allied Insurance Company of the Maldives Pvt Ltd with the aim to enhance knowledge regarding different disabilities.</p>
2019	<p>Sensitization session was held for 15 focal points identified from key stakeholders and line Ministries to enhance their knowledge on CRPD, Disability Act and regulations under this Act, the Disability Policy and also on the different types of disabilities.</p> <p>Sessions were held to create public awareness on rights of PWDs under CRPD and Disability Act and on inclusivity, in the islands of Dhaalu, Gnaviyani, Alif Dhaalu, Gaaf Alif and Haa Alif atolls, in which more than 1000 individuals took participated.</p>

Year	Activities held
	Sensitization sessions were held for 102 staff of Bank of Maldives Plc, State Trading Organization Plc, MTCC, Maldives Hajj Corporation Ltd and Maldives Post Ltd to enhance knowledge on different disabilities.
2021	Sessions were held to create public awareness on the rights of PWDs under CRPD and Disability Act and on inclusivity in the islands of Noonu and Shaviyani atolls, in which more than 800 individuals participated.
	Sensitization session was held for 20 staff of Maldives Polytechnique to enhance knowledge on different disabilities.
2022	Sensitization session was conducted as part of the induction programme by the Civil Service Training Institute, to educate new civil servant recruits on different disabilities, skills in dealing with PWDs and creating an inclusive work environment.

Respect for home and the family (art. 23)

Reply to paragraph 21 of the list of issues

99. Article 34(a) of the Constitution stipulates that every person of marriageable age as determined by law has the right to marry and to establish a family. In February 2020, Maldives has withdrawn its reservations to paragraphs 1 (b), (e), (g) and (h), and paragraph 2 of Article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

100. To address issues in the family justice system, Government initiated a family law reform in 2020, under which a comprehensive family law review is ongoing. The review focuses on protecting the rights of women and children, including removing barriers faced by women in accessing the family law system as well as ensuring more rights for women in their roles within the family.

101. NSPA provides several services to PWDs, including children with disabilities and their families, to increase accessibility and enhance their ability to live an independent life. Nevertheless, Government acknowledges the struggle of PWDs to access specialised care services, as most of the service providers and specialists are based in Malé.

102. With regard to the Sexual Offences Act, the law does not prohibit PWDs in general to engage in consensual sexual relationships in the same manner applicable for others. Section 28(a) of the Act considers it an offense if a person performs a sexual act with a person with mental disability, with the knowledge that the other person is incapable of giving consent to the act or understanding the nature of the act being carried out, or that the other person has no means of giving consent to a sexual act by reason of the mental disability.

Education (art. 24)

Reply to paragraph 22 of the list of issues

103. The revised IE Policy adopted in 2021 focuses on providing a full inclusion model by introducing inclusive education such as universal design for learning, co-teaching model and differentiated instructions along with the nine principles to develop responsible stakeholders in the community who promote equity and embrace learner diversity.

104. Additionally, needs of students with different types of disabilities as per the IE Policy, are considered when conducting trainings to the Special Education Needs (“SEN”) and mainstream teachers. Trainings are provided in the areas of autism, behaviour modification strategies, sign language, braille training, physical impairment, amongst other areas. Several programmes are in place in order to implement the plans of DOIE, which aim to cover all

schools across Maldives. Information sessions and trainings have been conducted for teachers and parents regarding the IE Policy.

105. Disability focused education system began in 2013 and during the initial years, a segregation model was practised with the introduction of SEN classes in schools. This approach was revised in 2021, with the enactment of the Education Act in 2020. Although other models exist, the revised model mainly promotes IE approach in all the schools. As the approach is fairly new, there is no data on rate of completion and reasons for limited participation in examinations.

106. The DOIE has introduced the “*Fahiveshi*” portal in 2022 to strengthen its data management system. DOIE has also been training leading teachers and principals of schools to ensure that all the necessary data are regularly updated, which will anticipatedly provide accurate data on students with disabilities

107. Although challenges exist regarding old school buildings, designs of new school buildings built since 2018 ensure physical accessibility for PWDs. Schools built under the National Resilience and Recovery Plan, which replaced SAP after the COVID-19 pandemic, envisages development of IE schools with a universal design concept. Classroom-blocks built under the India Grant are also provided with accessible infrastructure, assistive technology and sensory resources. So far, two IE units have been built under this project and construction of three schools are ongoing.

108. Students with visual impairment are provided education using braille resources. In 2022, braille training and sign language training were conducted for IE teachers of schools with students who have visual and hearing impairment. While braille curriculum documents are not yet provided, teachers develop materials using braille stencil.

109. The NCF caters to all the learners irrespective of disabilities and other form of difficulties. However, educational materials are not developed in accessible format for all the disabilities in the higher education sectors.

110. MOE has developed and shared anti-bullying guidelines to all schools and has conducted awareness sessions to all stakeholders. While isolated incidents of bullying still occur, these are not necessarily targeted towards PWDs. MOE assures investigation of such incidents and continues to work to ensure safe school environments. Additionally, Government acknowledges that there are gaps in providing psychosocial support to all schools across the country which poses hindrances towards prevention of bullying practices in some parts of the country.

111. The Ministry of Higher Education is dedicated to skill development of young persons including those with disabilities. Efforts underway include creating accessible and flexible learning system at Technical and Vocational, Education and Training centres across the Maldives; proactively reaching out to and guiding potential learners; updating the National Competency Standards; building capacity of employers to instill skills for a resilient work force; and tackling financial barriers through funding schemes. Career guidance activities, inclusive of students with disabilities, are conducted annually in schools.

Health (art. 25)

Reply to paragraph 23 of the list of issues

112. As noted above, COVID-19 pandemic information and awareness messages on prevention and management were disseminated using sign language interpretation. Ventilators were accessible to all those who needed them during the COVID-19 pandemic depending on necessity and availability, without any discrimination.

113. Improving the quality of health services across the country is a top priority of the Government. All essential health services are available at every island to all, including PWDs. Speech and occupational health services are available at regional and tertiary level facilities, specifically targeted to different groups of PWDs. Additionally, therapeutic services such as physiotherapy are available at all atoll level hospitals.

114. Laws and guidelines are in place to ensure that private health service providers adhere to the requirements of MOH in providing a conducive and healing environment for PWDs. MOH has published guidelines and standards for health infrastructure and health services grading criteria. Accessibility is a mandatory requirement for issuing licenses and approvals before health facilities are registered or re-registered by MOH.

115. Maldives has made considerable investments to improve the quality of health services and increase accessibility to health centres physically. Over 80% of health facilities in the country have entrance ramps.

116. Additionally, in an effort to increase the number of local personnel working in fields such as occupational health services and social services, local and foreign scholarship opportunities are open to interested parties. Moreover, career counselling fairs are also conducted to advertise job opportunities in fields of occupational health services.

117. The health service structure ensures that all essential health care services are provided in every inhabited island for all including PWDs. This includes HIV/AIDS, sexual and reproductive health services. All islands have health facilities providing sexual and reproductive health services and commodities as per the level of service tier. Referral linkages are in place for higher levels of service. The services are covered by *Aasandha* and are organized to provide both information and services.

118. Knowledge of the health service providers need to be increased in addressing the stigma attached to those suffering from HIV/AIDS at island level. Furthermore, additional efforts need to be made to ensure sexual and reproductive health programming reach PWDs and is friendly to youth, adolescents and children with disabilities.

119. Government acknowledges the importance of the training programmes and to this end, Mental Health Gap and Psychological First-Aid training is integrated in sessions to cater to all ranges of capabilities including disabilities, which includes how to respond, support and refer to other services.

120. Work is also underway to sensitize, orient and train focal points including clinical and technical focal points at every island to provide psychosocial first aid as per the Central and Regional Mental Health Plan, with the aim of enhancing services and addressing the rights of PWDs, especially persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities.

Habilitation and rehabilitation (art. 26)

Reply to paragraph 24 of the list of issues

121. The first Disability Management and Rehabilitation Centre has been established in the greater Malé region. The Centre provides specific services needed for persons with autism, down syndrome, cerebral palsy and intellectual disabilities. As for the atolls, services provided at regional hospitals include speech therapy, physiotherapy and psychiatric services. Those who need specialised services, including rehabilitation for children with disabilities, however, are required to travel to the greater Malé region.

Work and employment (art. 27)

Reply to paragraphs 25 and 26 of the list of issues

122. The proportion of PWDs employed in the public and private sectors have not been collated centrally and maintained. However, the Constitution and the Employment Act prohibits any form of discrimination in the employment process based on disability. The civil service recruitment process is merit based and provides equal opportunity for everyone to compete in the recruitment process.

123. The Ministry of Economic Development (“MED”) has begun work on the Sustainable and Integrated Labour Services (“SAILS”) project with financial support from the World Bank. PWDs including women and young people will be able to access information and services through targeted outreach programmes under this initiative. The project aims to

introduce unemployment insurance scheme and also reform and extend the work of the Job Center established at MED. Meaningful consultations are conducted in the implementation of the project and avenues of grievance redress will be established.

124. Under the SAILS project, MED will take special measures to reach vulnerable groups, including PWDs and elderly who do not have access to mainstream media or internet. Information related to the project will be communicated to elderly and PWDs in a user-friendly format.

125. With regard to gender-based violence in the workplace, the Gender Equality Act recognises gender-based violence as a form of gender-based discrimination and as noted above, the Act mandates establishment of redress mechanisms to receive complaints at places of employment.

126. Information on the programmes conducted to raise awareness amongst employers to make workspace more adaptive and inclusive for PWDs are provided in the table in paragraph 98 of these Replies.

Adequate standard of living and social protection (art. 28)

Reply to paragraph 27 of the list of issues

127. NSPA is mandated under the Disability Act to provide PWDs with disability allowance, as well as other financial assistance such as the single-parent allowance, foster parent allowance and elderly allowance. NSPA also administers the social health insurance scheme, therapeutic services, and provides health-related support based on the needs of PWDs.

128. A list of PWDs registered for disability allowance is maintained by NSPA. However, multiple issues have been identified in relation to the list, and NSPA has now launched the NDR as a remedy. This digital portal enables registration from across the Maldives. The medical assessments required to complete registration can be completed through the *Aasandha* Portal, where doctors can submit an assessment pertaining to the PWD's impairments and diagnoses.

129. NSPA's awareness activities are mainly targeted towards institutions and CSOs working in the sector. Information sessions are conducted for MOGFSS and local councils who in turn disseminate information to PWDs in the islands. NSPA also conducts awareness sessions to the general public in islands during monitoring visits. Details of such sessions are in the table below:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Audience</i>
2019	Session for Parents of PWDs (organised by MOGFSS).
	Session for all SEN teachers in the greater Malé region.
	Sessions in 4 islands of Haa Alif atoll for primary and secondary school teachers and parents.
	Sessions in 9 islands of Alif Dhaalu atoll for primary and secondary school teachers and parents and PWDs.
	Information session for social workers organised by MOGFSS.
2020	Information dissemination session for Government stakeholders and CSOs.
2021	11 sessions carried out for newly appointed Island Health Centre Administrators (organised by MOH).
	Sessions in 7 islands of Alif Dhaalu atoll for Government stakeholders, teachers and parents.

Year	Audience
2022	<p>Information session for social workers organised by MOGFSS and Family Protection Authority</p> <p>Information sessions in Kulhudhuffushi City for Government stakeholders, CSOs and teachers.</p> <p>Information sessions in Addu City for Government stakeholders, CSOs and teachers.</p> <p>Information sessions in Malé City for Government and non-government stakeholders and CSOs.</p> <p>Information session on NDR for CSOs working for PWD rights.</p> <p>Information sessions in Faafu and Meemu atoll for Government stakeholders, teachers and other heads of institutions.</p> <p>Information sessions in Noonu atoll for Government stakeholders, teachers and other heads of institutions.</p> <p>Information session carried out for HRCM staff.</p>

Participation in political and public life (art. 29)

Reply to paragraph 28 of the list of issues

130. Although there is lack of data on PWDs who have competed for elected positions, efforts have been made to ensure political participation of PWDs. As noted above, a 33% quota has been allocated for women for local council seats through amendments to the Decentralisation Act.

131. Furthermore, in order to ensure that the local councils seek participation from PWDs and organisations representing PWDs at island level while implementing the policies and programmes, the Local Government Authority (“LGA”) has included the level of inclusion of PWDs as one of the performance indicators when evaluating local councils. LGA is currently revising the performance index to make the section broader, and encourages local councils to include the participation of PWDs when devising developmental plans.

132. Additionally, LGA’s e-learning platform “*Kiyeveni Portal*” (*kiyeveni.mv*) has been designed to promote inclusiveness. The portal includes sign language interpretation for the courses offered. Efforts are underway to make this e-learning management platform more inclusive, so that all PWDs will have the access to the platform.

133. As noted above, the third amendment to the Elections (General) Act enables visually impaired voters to independently mark their choices on the ballot paper, ensuring confidentiality of votes. The Elections Commissions (“EC”) assign places with elevators and ramps as voting stations and considers width of door and surrounding path to ensure accessibility by PWDs.

134. The EC has redesigned election related awareness videos and audios tailored to increase accessibility and reachability to PWDs. These awareness materials are being used in the ongoing Presidential Elections of 2023.

Participation in cultural life, recreational activities, leisure and sport (art. 30)

Reply to paragraph 29 of the list of issues

135. Ramps have been established at Olympus Cinema, National Library and National Art Gallery to ensure accessibility, and museums and cultural centres under development will have special designs for accessibility.

136. Although most of the information in the National Library are not in an accessible format for PWDs, efforts are underway to come up with accessible content. For instance, a “*Thaana*” braille book has been published in 2016 and in 2022 to make Dhivehi language alphabet books accessible to those who are blind or visually impaired. Additionally, the Dhivehi Bahuge Academy (Academy for Dhivehi Language) conducts training programmes for the blind and visually impaired.

137. Provision of opportunities for PWDs to participate in national tournaments and cultural events are emphasized. In this regard, two students participated in the National Oratory Competition held in 2022. Moreover, the National Archives of Maldives has plans to establish a research facility for PWDs.

138. Efforts are on-going to provide opportunities for PWDs to get trained and also participate in sports, including in international competitions. In this regard, athletes have participated in the following events:

Year	Event
2019 and 2021	1 male and 1 female visually impaired athletes, 2 guide runners and 2 coaches were trained in the Tokyo Nippon Sport Science University.
2019	3 PWDs were trained at the Chennai Blind Football Coaching Course.
2021	1 male and 1 female participated in the Dubai 2021 World Para Athletics Grand Prix. 2 male athletes participated in the 2021 Dubai Para Badminton International. 1 male and 1 female athlete participated in Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. 1 female athlete participated in Asian Youth Para Games.
2022	1 female and 2 male athletes participated in Dubai Para Badminton International. 1 female and 3 male athletes participated in Adaptive Youth Sports Programme held in America. 2 female athletes participated in Korea Youth Para Camp.

139. Furthermore, 75 teachers from 36 schools were trained under the “*I am possible*” campaign, aiming to create awareness amongst the teachers on paralympic sports and to encourage inclusive sports activities in schools. Awareness sessions were also conducted for CSOs, parents and teachers in four islands and events have been held in three islands to introduce paralympic sports.

140. Ramps are built in Youth and Community Centres established by the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Community Empowerment, to ensure accessibility for PWDs.

141. Maldives has yet to make a decision on ratifying the Marrakesh Treaty.

III. Specific obligations (arts. 31 to 33)

Statistics and data collection (art. 31)

Reply to paragraph 30 of the list of issues

142. Law No: 16/2021 (Maldives Statistics Act) establishes a national statistics framework, aiming to advance the statistics domain, enable collection of relevant data on the Maldives' economy, ecology and social aspects, and to enable use of data responsibly for the benefit of all.

143. The Maldives Bureau of Statistics has conducted a nationwide census in September 2022 with the inclusion of Washington Group disability core questions. The results of the Census have been published, with data disaggregated by sex, age, and by type of disability.

International cooperation (art. 32)

Reply to paragraph 31 of the list of issues

144. Over the years, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has facilitated several projects to promote the social inclusion of PWDs under bilateral cooperation agreements. These include the following among others: Strengthening IE Support Units at schools in Fuahmulah City, Kulhudhuffushi City, Gaaf Dhaalu Thinadhoo, Laamu Gan, and Haa Alif Dhidhdhoo. These schools are provided with human capacity development, accessible infrastructure development and assistive technology.

National implementation and monitoring (art. 33)

Reply to paragraph 32 of the list of issues

145. The HRCM is constitutionally mandated to investigate and report on the observance of human rights, and to take steps to secure appropriate redress where rights have been violated. Government is committed to strengthening the functions and autonomy of the HRCM, in order to ensure its compliance with the Paris Principles.

146. In that regard, an amendment was brought to the Human Rights Commission Act in September 2020, to enhance HRCM's autonomy and remedy the result of *suo motu* proceedings initiated by the Supreme Court against HRCM in 2014, which restricted HRCM's ability to engage with international mechanisms.

147. In 2022, HRCM conducted an initial dialogue and a high-level dialogue with the Asia Pacific Forum ("APF"), which resulted in formulation of a strategic and actions plans to align its work in compliance with the Paris Principles. HRCM is preparing the application to apply for A-status accreditation. HRCM has also participated in many events held by Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions in 2022, including the APF's Annual Programme on accreditation, in early 2023.

148. Government notes the budgetary challenges faced by HRCM in the past years. To address this, the budget of the HRCM was increased by 16.36% in 2021. In 2022, USD 102,049.29 was added to the budget to allow HRCM to hire new staff. In 2023, HRCM received a budget of USD 2,012,403.96, which is an increase of approximately 3.81% in comparison to 2022.

149. With regard to programmes conducted by HRCM, in 2019, CSOs based in the greater Malé region was consulted to assess implementation UPR recommendations. In 2021, online consultations were held with PWDs and CSOs representing them, to understand the extent of CRPD rights realization by PWDs. HRCM also conducted field monitoring visits to outer islands in 2016 and 2022 specifically to assess the implementation status of CRPD, where CSOs were consulted.

150. The table below details efforts made by the HRCM to engage with PWDs in their work within the reporting period.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Activities conducted</i>
2018	<p>Assistance was sought from CSOs and individuals working for rights of PWDs to disseminate information during the 2018 election.</p> <p>Information on disability rights were made available in HRCM's online resource centre.</p> <p>CSO Forum was held for organizations and individuals working for rights of PWDs,</p> <p>The Human Rights Ambassador for Disability was appointed by the HRCM and consulted in 2018 and early 2019.</p> <p>Participation is sought from CSOs that work with PWDs every year on International Human Rights Day.</p>
2019	<p>Stakeholder groups, CSOs and individuals working for the rights of PWDs were consulted to design a social media campaign.</p>
2022	<p>CSOs and individuals working on the rights of PWDs were consulted during the process of developing the Human Rights Defenders Manual and the Advocacy Community Strategy.</p> <p>Awareness information was shared through 5 videos with sign language, audio and subtitles to increase information accessibility.</p> <p>Discussion session was carried out with PWDs, CSOs working with PWDs, and relevant State institutions, to create awareness of wheelchair accessibility.</p> <p>A series of meetings was carried out with PWDs, CSOs working on the rights of PWDs, and relevant State institutions to disseminate the findings of the survey published by HRCM on "Challenges of Wheelchair Accessibility in the Greater Malé".</p>

151. With regard to the National Disability Council, it is currently in the third year of five-year term and has a total of seven members. The administration of the Council is governed by Regulation No: 2012/R-79 (Regulation on the Administration of National Disability Council). The Council has developed an annual work plan and has been carrying out work accordingly, with meetings being held weekly.

IV. Conclusion

152. Government notes that, since the submission of the Initial Report by the Maldives under CRPD in October 2018, substantial progress has been made towards the promotion and protection of rights of PWDs. Multiple policies in SAP have been implemented including the launch of the National Disability Registry, coverage of certain treatments of mental illnesses under the national health insurance scheme, and the establishment of the Disability Management and Rehabilitation Centre. While the Government hopes to share with the Committee additional information during the review, Government also acknowledges the substantial road ahead and assures the Committee of its unwavering commitment towards inclusion of PWDs and mobilisation of resources to ensure their dignity, rights and well-being.