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## Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

### Initial report submitted by Oman under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant, due in 2022\*, \*\*

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

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



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## I. Introduction

1. The Sultanate of Oman acceded to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on 9 June 2020, pursuant to Royal Decree No. 46/2020. The Covenant then entered into force on 9 September 2023 having been published in the Official Gazette No. 1337 on 7 April 2020. At the moment of its accession to the Covenant, Oman entered a reservation to article 8 (1) (a) and (d).

2. The drafting of the initial report under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights accorded with the common core document under international human rights treaties ([HRI/CORE/OMN/2019](#)), which Oman submitted on 9 May 2019 and which updated the common core document deposited with the Secretariat of the United Nations on 11 April 2013. The new document, which reflects the developmental and legal advances Oman has made at various levels, is complementary to the present report. Currently, in 2024, the core document is being updated to integrate the advances Oman has made since 2020.

3. At its session No. 20/2023 held on 13 June 2023, the Council of Ministers gave its approval to the formation of working groups to draft reports under the international human rights treaties to which Oman acceded in 2020. One of these was a working group for the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which is led by the Ministry of the Economy and has a membership made up of representatives from the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Ministry of Education; the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs; the Royal Oman Police; the Ministry of Information; the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources; the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation; the Ministry of Social Development; and the Ministry of Health.

4. On 25 October 2023, with the approval of the Council of Ministers, the Minister of the Economy issued Ministerial Decree No. 25/2023 regarding the formation of a team led by the Deputy Minister of the Economy to supervise the drafting of reports under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Also on 25 October 2023, the Minister issued Ministerial Decree No. 267/2023 regarding the formation of a technical team to draft the reports under the Covenant. The technical team is led by the Director General for foreign economic relations at the Ministry of the Economy and has members from the aforementioned institutions as well as from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and the Ministry of Labour. This is because the Covenant includes provisions that affect the mandate of those two Ministries. The technical team is responsible for producing a first draft of the report under the Covenant and has other related responsibilities.

5. The two teams (the supervisory and the technical) – as well as a drafting team made up of representatives from the aforementioned institutions as well as from the National Centre for Statistics and Information – held a number of meetings in the six months between December 2023 and May 2024. At the same time, workshops were held to train members of the teams in how to draft reports under international human rights treaties in general, and in the reporting mechanism of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in particular. During the same period, ministries and other bodies began providing the data and information required under the reporting guidelines of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, using a template that identified the main and subsidiary institutions concerned with articles 1 to 15 of the Covenant. The working groups continued their work on the draft during the first two quarters of 2024 before submitting the text to all relevant ministries and entities (as well as to civil society organizations and the Oman Human Rights Commission) for them to make comments that could be integrated into the final text.

6. On 21 May 2024, the Ministry of the Economy organized a panel meeting to discuss the final draft of the initial report. Among those participating were deputy ministers and ministerial directors general; administrative and executive officials in relevant agencies; representatives of specialized committees from the Shura Council and the State Council; representatives from civil society organizations and the Oman Human Rights Commission; and representatives from international organizations with offices in Oman, such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The purpose of the panel meeting was to collect

any final observations those bodies had to make concerning the initial report, which was then amended in the light of the observations, recommendations and comments received.

## Demographic, economic, social and cultural characteristics

7. Here below, the present report gives updated information concerning the demographic, economic, social and cultural characteristics previously outlined in paragraphs 7 to 12 of the common core document of 2019.

8. According to 2023 data, the population of Oman stands at 5,165,602 persons, of whom women account for 37.9 per cent and men for 62.1 per cent, with an estimated population growth rate of 4.7 per cent. The difference in the proportion of males and females is due to the presence of migrant workers, the majority of whom are male. Among the Omani population, which totals around 2.9 million, 49.7 per cent are female. The crude birth rate for Omani citizens is 24.9 per 1,000 and the crude death rate is 2.9 per 1,000. As of 2022, life expectancy at birth is 77 years: 75.4 for men and 78.9 for women. According to 2023 data, there are 2,236,645 migrants in Oman, accounting for 43 per cent of the total population. Table 1 in annex 3 to the common core document sets out demographic indicators of population growth and density between 2020 and 2023.

9. As concerns the age distribution of the population, according to 2023 data, children represent a significant proportion of the population (both the total population and the Omani population). In fact, children under the age of 18 account for 29 per cent of the total population and 43 per cent of the Omani population; 21 per cent of the total population and 18 per cent of the Omani population fall within the 18–29 age bracket; and 4 per cent of the overall population and 6 per cent of the Omani population are over the age of 60. The proportions differ between the total population and the Omani population because the majority of migrants aged between 15 and 64. Although the overall dependency ratio of the population is 38 per cent, it varies between the Omani population (72 per cent) and the migrant population (10 per cent). The high dependency ratio among the Omani population is due to the large proportion of children and older persons, whereas the majority of immigrants are unaccompanied by families or children. Table 2 in annex 2 sets out demographic indicators of age structure and dependency ratios for the Omani and migrant populations between 2020 and 2023.

10. Oman has reached a high level of overall development, and the achievements and fruits of the modern Omani renaissance are extensive. The country has made great progress in areas such as education, health, road infrastructure, power generation, water and communications, across all governorates without exception, thus creating well-being across society. The progress of development in recent years has been marked by justice and equity, and Oman is classified as a State with a high level of human development, ranking fifty-ninth on the Human Development Index (HDI), with an HDI value for 2023/24 of 0.819. It has also received commendations in United Nations reports on human development for its progress towards achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The following table sets out human development indicators in Oman as of 2023/24.

HDI value	Life expectancy at birth in years	Average number of years of schooling	Average expected number of years of schooling	Gross national income per capita in dollars (2017)	Gross national income per capita rank minus HDI rank
0.819	73.9	11.09	13.0	32 976	-13

Source: Human Development Report, latest edition (2023/24), United Nations Development Programme.

11. Oman has been striving to achieve numerous human rights-related goals, and this is reflected in the high standard of living enjoyed by the population. According to 2022 indicators produced by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, gross national income per capita stands at \$20,963.6. Average life expectancy for Omanis is 77 years, the infant mortality rate is 8.8 per 1,000 and the under-5 mortality rate is 11.4 per 1,000. As of

the academic year 2022/23, average net enrolment rates in education were 98.4 per cent (classes 1 to 4), 96.6 per cent (classes 5 to 10) and 85.6 per cent (classes 11 and 12). The illiteracy rate among the overall Omani population aged 15 and above stood at 4.8 per cent in 2023, compared with 5.1 per cent in 2022. This progress is also reflected in other demographic, social, economic and cultural indicators, which are included in appendix 3 in accordance with the reporting guidelines for common core documents (annexes 1 and 2).

12. Oman is working to ensure that all citizens and residents have access to advanced healthcare on a fair and equal basis and the State remains committed to the provision of healthcare across all governorates. Government spending on health in 2022/23 was 6.2 per cent of total State expenditure, which is reflected in the quality of the health services provided. As of 2022, there were 1,933 public and private hospitals and health centres in Oman.

13. Oman places great value on children's right to education. Primary education is compulsory, and education is free in State-run schools up to the post-primary level. In 2022, government spending on education was 9.7 per cent of total State expenditure. As of the academic year 2022/23, there were 1,241 State-run schools attended by 744,016 students, in addition to 150,506 students in private schools.

14. Oman Vision 2040, which has seen the widespread involvement of all segments of society, constitutes a road map for a prosperous future in which Omanis and residents enjoy prosperity, security, freedom, justice and equality. Based on a consensus around 12 national priorities, the Vision seeks to improve quality of life for citizens and residents alike by raising living standards; providing well-being and social security; strengthening and protecting family and community safety, cohesion and stability; providing decent job opportunities; and guaranteeing fundamental rights and freedoms. The Vision also underscores the importance of investing in and developing human capital by laying the foundations for a high-quality system of education that delivers free, compulsory and comprehensive schooling. It also seeks to consolidate, improve and extend the system of preventive and therapeutic healthcare at all levels. Under the Vision, moreover, civil society organizations are encouraged to play an important role by developing and coordinating programmes to promote social cohesion, preserve cultural and historical heritage and take an active part in social, economic and humanitarian activities.

## **II. Measures taken by the State to implement various articles of the Covenant**

15. This section of the report sets forth the legislative, institutional and administrative measures taken by Oman to follow up on the implementation of articles 1–15 of the Covenant.

### **Article 1 Right to self-determination**

16. Oman believes that justice is fundamental for the progress of peoples and nations and the coexistence of all human beings of different races, backgrounds, ethnicities, affiliations and countries. It is for this reason that the country's approach to foreign policy and relations with other States is marked by a striving after justice and peace.

17. Article 13 of the Basic Law of the State, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 6/2021, stipulates that the political principles of Oman consist in preserving the country's independence and sovereignty; maintaining national integrity, security and stability; defending the State; and strengthening ties of cooperation and friendship between nations and peoples on a basis of mutual respect, shared interests, non-interference in internal affairs and observance of international and regional covenants and treaties and recognized rules of international law. This serves to promote peace and security between countries and among peoples.

18. Believing as it does in peoples' right to self-determination, Oman has always supported international resolutions upholding that right, within the framework of the

United Nations system. Most notably, this includes resolutions relating to the question of Palestine and the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital and within the borders of 4 June 1967, as per the relevant Security Council resolution.

19. Article 14 of the Basic Law of the State guarantees freedom of economic activity on a basis of social justice and cooperation, while balancing public and private activities, in order to pursue socioeconomic development, increase production and achieve prosperity for citizens by raising their standard of living, providing job opportunities and eradicating poverty. The article states: "Natural wealth and resources are the property of the State, which is responsible for their preservation and proper utilization in accordance with the provisions of the law." Acting in accordance with that article, Oman remains committed to providing an environment conducive to economic justice for its citizens and has adopted policies aimed at promoting economic recovery and self-sufficiency and promoting competitiveness. All these elements play a role in achieving the Oman Vision 2040 and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Oman is also making ever greater economic efforts to consolidate its relations with friendly countries and to build new strategic partnerships in order to further the interests of all sides and to have a positive effect on economic development.

20. In an effort to achieve justice for all persons and to promote equal rights for all groups in society, Oman has embraced legal principles and international standards to protect citizens, residents and persons present in its territory. The rights of all those groups are guaranteed and underpinned by social justice, as stipulated in article 15 of the Basic Law of the State: "Justice, equality and equal opportunities between citizens are the bedrock of society and are guaranteed by the State. Mutual support and compassion act as close bonds between citizens. Strengthening national unity is a duty, and the State is to prohibit any action that gives rise to division or discord, or that compromises national unity." The same article also guarantees citizens' freedom to choose their own work, within the limits of the law.

21. Throughout its history, Oman has stood out for its well-balanced relations with other countries around the world; for its political positions characterized by principles of good neighbourliness, respect for the sovereignty of other States and a categorical rejection of any interference in their internal affairs; for its adherence to principles of truth, justice and equity; for its action to resolve disputes by peaceful means and positive dialogue; and for its efforts to promote mutual interests with other friendly States.

22. In accordance with the guidelines relating to general comment No. 12 and, specifically, to paragraph 13 regarding the economic and physical accessibility of food, Oman can affirm that it dedicates a great deal of attention to the issue of food security and food supplies. It is, in fact, constantly striving to enhance its food security structures and accelerate the transformation towards effective and efficient systems of agriculture that are resilient to global challenges. To this end, the State is running programmes and initiatives aimed at supporting persons who work in the agriculture, livestock and fisheries sectors with the aim of boosting productivity and providing education and guidance to members of the communities that operate in those areas, across different governorates. In this connection, the State distributes seeds and plants for agricultural crops; supports manufacturing industries; disseminates modern agriculture, livestock and fishery technologies; and provides support for the marketing of produce. Oman has also launched a number of research projects with a view to the preservation of genetic resources in agriculture and livestock farming and the protection of local seeds and animal breeds. The State is also working to empower women in rural areas across different governorates.

23. Oman is boosting investments in food security projects with a view to achieving self-sufficiency at the local level. To this end and in order to achieve food security and to nourish all its citizens, the State is providing investment opportunities in various sectors. It is also encouraging the creation of businesses that add value or provide production inputs as well as of manufacturing industries. The State, in fact, has erected a number of institutional frameworks and other initiatives to increase local food production, make food supply chains more efficient and enhance nutritional awareness. These efforts are all part of the Oman Vision 2040, which underscores the importance of food security as one of the pillars of sustainable development and economic diversification, also in the agricultural, fisheries and water resource sectors.

24. The Omani Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is in the process of overseeing a raft of investment projects in the field of food security (agriculture, livestock, fisheries and water), the aim being to boost local production, achieve self-sufficiency and provide job opportunities. Investment opportunities are being made available via the “*Tatwir*” platform beginning with 100 opportunities in 2022 and going up to 200 in 2024. The opportunities vary as to the activities involved, the areas and the target groups but they are clearly regulated to ensure their success. This entails verification of the technical and financial capabilities of investors and the suitability of the site chosen to run the project. The first “food security laboratory” was run in 2021, resulting in projects with an investment value of 1.2 billion Omani rials (RO) and with the value of investments increasing annually by 10 per cent. Another “food security laboratory” was run in 2023 and special “problem-solving clinics” were set up in 2022.

25. As part of further efforts to achieve food security in Oman, the Council of Ministers has approved a plan that envisages a sum of RO 5 million up to 2027 to support local wheat production. The initiative also envisions the allocation of land for wheat cultivation in a number of governorates, support for farmers with Omani wheat seed to help them grow their crops and improve the quality of national wheat production and collaboration with partners from the government and private sectors. These partners include the Ministry of Finance; the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning; the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment; and the Oman Flour Mills Company. This is in addition to other programmes and projects aimed at achieving self-sufficiency. It is important to note that food security projects receive government support via the development budget, including the Al-Najd Agricultural Zone, which is a large-scale and diversified agricultural project. In addition to this, the Government has allocated RO 25 million in the general State budget for the stabilization of food commodity prices in order to reduce the impact of crises and price rises.

## **Article 2**

### **Respect for the rights enshrined in the Covenant**

#### **Exercise of rights without discrimination**

26. The legal foundation underpinning all rights and duties in Oman is the Basic Law of the State, which regulates public freedoms and enshrines the legal principles on which national legislation is based. The Basic Law enjoins the promotion of all public rights, duties and freedoms and, in article 12, affirms that governance is to be based on justice, consultation and equality. For its part, chapter II of the Basic Law focuses on the guiding principles of State policy and illustrates the legal frameworks surrounding the principles of equality and non-discrimination. Section III of the chapter (entitled “Social principles”) stipulates that the State is to guarantee justice, equality and equal opportunity as the bedrock of society, just as it is to ensure equality between men and women, as set forth in the law. It follows from this that all legislation is to adhere to – and avoid any contradiction with – the principles enshrined in the Basic Law. In particular, article 15 of the Basic Law reaffirms the State’s duty to achieve gender equality and to ensure the welfare of children, persons with disabilities, young persons and the rising generations. The article, moreover, is not limited to Omanis but, in accordance with the Covenant, is general and universal.

27. Equality and non-discrimination are both enshrined in the Basic Law of Oman where those principles are upheld by further provisions relating to the right to work, education and health. There is nothing in Omani legislation that authorizes discrimination against a particular group of citizens in the enjoyment of the rights enshrined in the Basic Law. All legislation and regulations enacted by Oman envisage the same rights, on a basis of equality and non-discrimination, particularly in the areas of employment, health, education, housing and social security, and the Basic Law of the State does not admit that any of the persons subject to its provisions should suffer any discrimination in the enjoyment of their rights.

28. Legislation is, in fact, a fabric of interlaced safeguards and article 21 of the Basic Law of the State reaffirms the fact that citizens have equal rights and duties without discrimination on grounds of sex, origin, colour, language, religion, religious community, domicile or social status. Chapter III of the Basic Law guarantees economic, social, cultural, civil and political

rights and duties, as well as personal freedom, the freedom to perform religious rites and freedom of opinion and expression.

29. In enactment of the principles of equality before the law and the right to legal protection, and in the light of the State's obligations under international human rights instruments, article 28 of the Basic Law states that accused persons have the right to appoint a qualified individual to defend them at trial. The right of recourse to justice is enshrined in article 30 of the Basic Law, which stipulates that this right is to be protected and guaranteed for all persons. Furthermore, the State is to act to ensure that the organs of justice are accessible to litigants and that cases are adjudicated promptly. The question of legal assistance in Oman is governed by the regulations on legal aid for impoverished persons, which were issued under Ministerial Decree No. 91/2009. It should be emphasized that the rights and safeguards enshrined in legislation are delivered on a basis of equality and non-discrimination; therefore, victims whose rights have been violated can bring a case before any court, with the specific level and type of court being dependent on the right violated and the applicable law. This is because the right to bring legal action is guaranteed for all people without discrimination, under the Basic Law of the State.

30. Acting under the Basic Law, Oman has provided all available means to ensure that the organs of justice are accessible to litigants and that cases are adjudicated promptly. In view of the geographical extension of Oman, courts of different kinds are distributed across all governorates and provinces according to their hierarchy: the Supreme Court, courts of appeal and courts of first instance. Legislators in Oman have also acted to regulate non-judicial remedies by creating specialized committees, such as the Oman Human Rights Commission, conciliation committees and labour dispute-resolution committees.

31. Oman is cognizant of the importance – in furtherance of the principle of equality – of full and equal participation by all segments of society in political and public life and in decision-making roles. National legislation and laws make no distinction between women and men as concerns appointment to posts, standing for elected office or voting. This state of affairs is clearly reflected in the composition of the Government of Oman and in senior, intermediate and public-facing government administration. As concerns the State Council, article 69 of the Basic Law of the State stipulates that its members are to be appointed by royal decree but does not impose any discriminatory conditions or restrictions. Appointment is based solely on accumulated experience and merit. According to article 70 of the Basic Law, the Shura Council is to consist of elected members representing all provinces of the Sultanate of Oman, and men and women may vote and stand for membership without discrimination. The conditions for membership of both the State Council and the Shura Council are set forth in the Act regulating the Council of Oman, issued pursuant to Royal Decree No. 7/2021.

32. The Labour Act, promulgated under Royal Decree No. 53/2023, and the Social Protection Act, promulgated under Royal Decree No. 52/2023, envisage an equal right to work and to the fruits of work for men and women. Women account for 27.9 per cent of the workforce in the public sector and 31 per cent in the private sector, and they have made progress at the level of senior, intermediate and public-facing government administration, reaching 38.5 per cent in 2023.

33. Oman provides healthcare, education and other services throughout the country, according to need and on the basis of health and education plans, without making any distinction between rural and urban areas. In addition to this, national legislation envisages safeguards for the welfare of persons from low-income groups, such as divorced women, widows, older persons, persons with disabilities and others who are entitled to benefits under the conditions set forth in the Social Protection Act. The State disburses such benefits to those persons on a non-contributory basis.

34. Oman promotes principles of equality and human rights by raising awareness through media campaigns via various channels and by ensuring that such principles are incorporated into school curricula. As a result, there is nothing that might give rise to any kind of prejudice against a specific population group. On the contrary, all inhabitants of Oman live in a State that seeks to build a harmonious and cohesive society.

35. All units of the administrative apparatus of the State as well as other legal persons, both public and private, operate on a basis of equality and non-discrimination, as enshrined in the Basic Law and upheld in legislation. Oman respects citizens and non-citizens alike, and the principles of respect and non-discrimination, which derive from Islam, are upheld in all legislation. In this context, Oman has promulgated many laws and pieces of legislation that enjoin respect for rights, including some that explicitly stipulate adherence to principles of equality and non-discrimination:

- Article 2 of the Children's Act, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 22/2014 guarantees the right of children to non-discrimination on grounds of colour, sex, origin, language, religion or social status, or on any other grounds.
- Article 38 of the Children's Act stipulates that the purpose of education in Oman is to instil values of equality between individuals and of non-discrimination on grounds of religion, sex, ethnicity, race, social origin or disability, or on any other grounds.
- Article 2 of the School Education Act, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 31/2023, states that the purpose of education is to achieve the overarching and integrated development of children, while article 14 of the Act stipulates that education in State-run schools is to be free of charge. This is not limited only to Omani pupils. For its part, article 42 of the Act prohibits any discrimination between pupils on grounds of sex, origin, colour, language, religion, religious community, domicile or social status.
- Article 12 (8) of the Water and Sanitation Regulation Act, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 40/2023, stipulates that all licenses must include general conditions that do not discriminate in favour of or against any person.
- Article 108 of the Criminal Code, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 7/2018, stipulates that anyone who promotes religious or sectarian discord or conflict is liable to a term of imprisonment. It is clear from this that Oman seeks to combat discrimination and that any incitement to racial discrimination constitutes a crime.

36. Article 93 of the Basic Law of the State stipulates that international charters and treaties have force of law once they have been ratified. Oman has reaffirmed its commitment to equality and non-discrimination at both the national and the international levels by acceding to a number of anti-discrimination instruments, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. These instruments are part of current national law and have binding force on all parties, be they units within the administrative apparatus of the State, public or private legal persons or individual citizens and residents.

#### **Protect and promote the economic rights of non-citizens**

37. The Foreign Capital Investment Act, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 50/2019, aims to protect and promote the economic rights of non-citizens in Oman by providing a stable and transparent legal environment for investment and thereby helping to attract investors from abroad. The Act also serves to protect invested capital and profits and therefore helps to increase trust between foreign investors and the State and to encourage continuing investments in the local market. In addition to this, the Act envisages protection for the intellectual property of foreign investors and thus fosters the transfer of technology and innovation while also promoting innovation in Oman itself. Lastly, the Act also simplifies investment procedures for foreign investors and makes it easier for them to acquire the visas and licences necessary to establish companies.

38. The economic rights of foreigners in Oman are protected under national legislation. In that connection, article 42 of the Basic Law of the State stipulates: "All residents or persons lawfully present in Oman enjoy the protection of their person and property, in accordance with the law." The Basic Law also protects the right of Omanis and others to own property, as article 14 reads: "Private property is protected, and no one is to be prevented from disposing of their property, save within the limits of the law. Similarly, no one is to be deprived of their property, save in the public interest, under the circumstances specified in law and in return for fair compensation."

39. As concerns the impact of “international economic and technical assistance and cooperation, whether received or provided by the State Party”, as stated in paragraph 9 of the reporting guidelines, Oman can affirm that it has been and remains open to the world and that it pursues positive partnerships that benefit human beings at home and abroad. The country’s actions in this regard are undergirded by an unwavering conviction that civilization is based on peace, cooperation and positive partnerships; that no place and no individual should be left behind as a result of the wounds inflicted by wars or held back by hunger, poverty and ignorance; and that no one should risk death due to disease, epidemics or lack of treatment. This is the true pathway to civilization and has always characterized the approach of Oman to international questions and foreign partnerships.

40. Oman applies the principle of transparency when working to meet its obligations towards international organizations and is, in fact, one of the States most committed to providing such organizations with financial and logistic support. It has also embraced an approach whereby, out of respect for the privacy of poor countries and needy communities, it limits as much as possible the sharing of data about the aid it provides. Since the modern renaissance of Oman began 54 years ago, history has recorded shining instances of its interventions both near and far, and of its skilful handling of many knotty problems both regionally and internationally. The clear stance the country has taken and its good intentions in dealing with such issues have earned it a standing that it has consolidated over the years and that it still holds today as it dexterously strikes a balance between its internal and external affairs.

41. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, may God protect him, reaffirmed the details of this policy in the first speech he made after assuming the reins of government. He noted then that Oman would continue its role as an active member of the United Nations, respect the Charter of the Organization and work with Member States to pursue international peace and security and to spread economic prosperity to all countries of the world. This integrated approach is translated into reality in multiple aspects of the country’s international partnerships. In fact, Oman annually allocates RO 10 million (more than \$25 million) from the general State budget in the form of direct aid to less economically developed countries. At the same time, the Oman Charitable Organization also deals with multiple aspects of international issues, notably by collecting donations from private institutions and Omani society. These go to fund the regular programmes the Organization runs outside Oman, as well as its emergency programmes in countries or in specific communities, which it further enhances with targeted campaigns to raise support. In the field of healthcare, Oman supports child immunization programmes in a number of countries and provides direct assistance, within the limits of available resources, by organizing air bridges to treat sick and injured persons in emergency situations.

42. In the context of its membership of the United Nations and (between 2022 and 2024) of the Economic and Social Council, Oman works alongside international organizations and contributes to the cost of international peacekeeping operations in many regions around the world. In addition to this, the State is working to boost the economies of less-developed countries by promoting imports, direct exports and re-exports in order to achieve direct financial returns and enhance economic growth in those States. Indicators show that the volume of trade has expanded over recent years, reaching \$97,787 million in 2023.

43. On a separate front, Oman plays a leading role in the administration of the Arab Regional Cybersecurity Centre for the least-developed Arab countries, which serves the cybersecurity needs of 12 member States. In the context of international academic partnerships, the Sultan Qaboos Academic Chairs act as global academic platforms that seek to expand knowledge towards new horizons and to promote leading international scholars and researchers. There are currently 16 such Chairs that support academic research, innovation and the advancement of knowledge.

44. Civil society organizations also play an important role in promoting international partnerships and in giving Oman greater visibility on the map of international action in the service of humankind and development. One significant example of this is the Omani Society for Human Resources Management which works to forge partnerships with international human development institutions (around 10 institutions altogether). The Society also runs its own annual conference, the seventh of which was held at the beginning of 2024, with more

than 900 participants from different countries around the world. In addition, the thirty-first international congress of the International Federation of Journalists was held in Muscat from 13 May to 4 June 2022, attended by more than 400 participants representing over 160 press unions, syndicates and associations from 120 countries.

### **Article 3**

#### **Equality of rights between men and women**

##### **Equality of men and women in the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights enshrined in the Covenant**

45. Article 15 (3) of the Basic Law of the State reads: “The family is the cornerstone of society, and its pillars are religion, morality and patriotism, and the State is to endeavour to maintain the cohesion and stability of the family and consolidate its values. The State is to guarantee equality between women and men and to undertake to provide care for children, persons with disabilities and young people, in the manner prescribed by law.” This provision is not limited only to citizens, but is general and universal, and covers all persons in the country.

46. Article 18 in chapter III of the Basic Law (entitled “Public rights and duties”) states: “Every human being has the right to life and dignity, and the State is to be responsible for respecting and protecting that right, in accordance with the law.” This is reiterated in most other articles in the chapter. Article 21 upholds the principle of equality and stipulates that all citizens are equal before the law and have equal public rights and duties, without discrimination on grounds of sex, origin, colour, language, religion, confession, domicile or social status. Following the promulgation of the Basic Law, all laws and regulations are required to be consistent therewith and to clearly stipulate the State’s obligation to guarantee equality between women and men.

47. At the core of Omani policy lies the conviction that to protect and empower women is to protect society as a whole. The State will therefore pursue that goal in all its current and future strategies, plans and programmes.

48. The information provided above shows that political will has supported equality between men and women in Oman and has sought, as a general principle, to prohibit the embodiment in law of any kind of gender-based discrimination. To this end, no effort has been spared in the formulation of public policy or of national plans and strategies. Thanks to this, Omani women are present in various posts and at various levels in a number of State institutions.

49. The Council of Ministers includes three female ministers and five female deputy ministers. Moreover, under Royal Decree No. 75/2023, 18 women were appointed to the State Council for its eighth term (2023–2027) where they account for 21 per cent of the total Council membership. In the year 2022/23, five female ambassadors were appointed to Omani missions abroad bringing the total number of female ambassadors, both inside and outside Oman, to seven as of 2024. In the same year, there were 47 Omani female diplomats serving in the country’s missions abroad.

50. In addition to this, there are women on the staff of the Office of the Public Prosecution, which is part of the judiciary (Chief Prosecutor, first and second deputy prosecutors, assistant prosecutors), and women work as registrars in various judicial bodies and in courts of all levels (first instance, appeal and high courts). Women also perform other roles; for example, in the legal profession or on think tanks of various kinds. Nonetheless, despite the fact that Omani women have the opportunity to compete for judicial positions under the same conditions as men as regards wages, promotions and career advancement, they have not yet fully achieved this goal. It is to be hoped that they will be able to do so in the near future and thus increase their presence in this field.

51. Article 16 of the Basic Law of the State, which concerns cultural principles, stipulates that education is a cornerstone of social progress and is to be safeguarded and disseminated by the State. Article 21, which concerns gender equality, stipulates that women and men have equal rights to education. This constitutes a fundamental principle against which all other

public rights and duties are measured. The State is to provide public education and to encourage the establishment of private schools and institutes, under State supervision, in order to combat illiteracy among both sexes.

52. As part of its commitment to equality of opportunity in education, the Ministry of Education is seeking to revise school curricula in order to integrate the knowledge, skills and attitudes required by the labour market and by scientific and technological advances, without discrimination between women and men. The Ministry is also reviewing all school curricula to ensure that male and female roles are shown as interchangeable, on a basis of equality of rights and duties. References that incorporate discriminatory or stereotypical gender distinctions have been removed to ensure a diversity of images and narratives concerning both sexes, without undue differentiation.

53. With a view to ensuring continuous training on women's rights and gender equality, a manual has been prepared for persons who work with adolescents (social workers, psychologists and counsellors) to help them raise awareness among their charges. Workshops have been organized to train teaching staff, a large proportion of whom are women, on the new manual.

54. The Code of Civil and Commercial Procedure includes a number of safeguards enabling women to exercise their right to take legal action. It recognizes their right to bring a case before courts of first instance, to appeal against rulings before courts of appeal and to contest appeal court rulings before the Supreme Court. The time limits for appealing against court rulings are short in order to expedite the resolution of cases and enable the parties concerned to obtain their rights. Furthermore, many cases involving women are dealt with as a matter of urgency; for example, cases concerning maintenance payments or custody are given priority over other cases. The right to custody, in fact, is regulated by the Personal Status Act, which is consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Children's Act. Custody, moreover, is a children's right and the law therefore accords priority to the matter of identifying the child's guardian. The underlying rule set forth in the Personal Status Act is that, when a marital relationship ends, custody falls by right to the woman, while always taking full account of the best interests of the child concerned.

55. The Labour Act clearly states that its provisions are equally applicable to male and female workers, without discrimination, when their conditions of work are the same. Article 5 of the Act includes a specific provision that prohibits any form of forced or compulsory labour. Moreover, and in order to provide greater protection for working women, the Act stipulates that the termination of a contract of employment contract will be considered as arbitrary dismissal if it was occasioned by pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding.

56. In the same year that Oman acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women under Royal Decree No. 42/2005, the Ministry of Social Development formed a committee with members from a number of relevant bodies to follow up on the implementation of the Convention and submit the relevant reports. The level of representation on the committee was then gradually raised over a number of stages between 2012 and 2021. It is currently led by the Minister of Social Development and its membership has been expanded to include representatives from civil society organizations, the private sector, the legislature (i.e., the State Council and the Shura Council), the judiciary, the Oman Human Rights Commission and the women's committee of the General Federation of Oman Workers. In addition to its other duties, the committee oversees the efforts of the State to improve conditions for women and to disseminate a culture of gender equality. Since it was first created, the committee has had occasion to discuss four periodic reports before the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women at the offices of the United Nations. The presentation of the initial report took place of 4 October 2011, the combined second and third periodic reports were presented on 10 March 2016 and the fourth periodic report on 7 February 2024.

57. Oman has acted in several ways to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions at all levels in national institutions and mechanisms, and women have been entrusted with leadership roles in a number of political, economic and social spheres. In coordination with other ministries, the Department for Women in the General Directorate for Family Development of the Ministry of Social Development deals with the

planning and implementation of female empowerment across a number of areas. The Ministry of Social Development holds regular workshops and lectures about enhancing the status of women and promoting their rights in all fields.

58. The Ministry of Social Development encourages women to participate in voluntary work, and it has organized a series of workshops in the governorates dedicated to envisioning future support for their efforts in that regard. Omani women's organizations – which currently number 62, with 6 branches across all the governorates of Oman – run programmes and initiatives aimed at empowering and capacity-building among women and at addressing the social issues facing them and their families.

59. On the subject of the full and equal participation of women in political and public life at decision-making levels, laws and legislation in Oman do not differentiate between men and women in their rights to stand as candidates or to vote. Indeed, justice, equality and equal opportunities among citizens are all enshrined in articles 15 and 21 of the Basic Law of the State. Article 69 of the Basic Law stipulates: "The State Council is to consist of members appointed by Royal Decree" while, according to article 70, the Shura Council is to be made up of elected members who represent all provinces of Oman and who are chosen by direct secret ballot, as described in law. The conditions for membership of the State Council and the Shura Council are set forth in the Act regulating the Council of Oman, issued pursuant to Royal Decree No. 7/2021, while the conditions for exercising the right to stand as candidate or vote for members in the Shura Council are described in the Shura Council Elections Act, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 58/2013. Article 23 of that Act states that all citizens have the right to apply for inclusion in the electoral register and sets forth the relevant conditions.

60. Omani women also enjoy this right and are able to vote and to run for office. Moreover, as members of the Shura Council since 1994, they have played a pioneering role among countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and 48 per cent of the persons voting in the elections for the 2023–2027 term of the Shura Council were women.

61. In 2023, the Ministry of Social Development rolled out a raft of leadership empowerment programmes for women in decision-making roles, in order to enhance their political participation and build their capacities and skills in view of the elections for the tenth term of the Shura Council. To this end, the Ministry organized meetings with civil society organizations to support women and help them participate in the electoral process and the voting. Four leadership empowerment training programmes were run for 32 women candidates and other female community leaders.

62. Royal Decree No. 55/2010, which concerns the practice of dowry, allows women to have direct recourse to the sharia division of the Supreme Court if their guardian refuses to allow them to marry the person they wish. They may, moreover, challenge the court ruling directly before the Sultan. Such cases are dealt with as a matter of priority.

63. Amendments have been made to article 12 of the Omani Passport Act, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 11/2010. According to the amendment, married women have the right to obtain a passport without requiring the written consent of their husbands, whereas previously such consent had been necessary. Thus, under the amendment, women are entitled to a passport without the consent of a guardian and to travel by any means without the need for the approval of any person or entity. In addition to this, the reservation to article 15 (4) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has been withdrawn, allowing women freedom of residence and movement as set forth in the Convention.

64. Ministerial Decree No. 4/2011 of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment grants women the possibility of running a commercial activity from their homes and specifies which activities are admissible in that regard.

65. The General Federation of Oman Workers has a women's committee which deals with issues affecting working women and promotes their involvement in trade union activity.

66. The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry has set up a "businesswomen's forum", which is responsible for dealing with issues affecting such women and addressing the problems and obstacles they face on the labour market. An additional eight committees for businesswomen – all led by women – have been established in the governorates.

67. The workforce participation rate of Omani women aged 15 and above stood at 33.2 per cent in 2023, as compared to 32.1 per cent in 2022. Also in 2023, female workers accounted for 83 per cent of all economically active Omani women, and the total number of Omani female workers increased by 8 per cent in 2023 with respect to 2022. Likewise in 2023, female workers accounted for 29 per cent of all working Omanis, Omani women's contribution to the national economy stood at 9.4 per cent and the total number of Omani women business owners reached 13,106 (or 5.2 per cent of the total).

68. In terms of ownership of land or housing units, in 2023, women accounted for around 39 per cent of persons owing one or more plots of land and 10 per cent of owners of housing units.

69. In order to support women in special situations, Oman has rolled out the "*Tamkeen*" programme, which helps women from families receiving assistance from the Ministry of Social Development or families on income support. The initiative entails the erection of small businesses, involvement in promotional and marketing initiatives for working families, access to sales outlets and participation in socioeconomic empowerment training programmes. A total of 1,946 women benefited from this initiative between 2021 and 2023.

70. A programme to empower female prison inmates has been run since 2020, thanks to cooperation between the Ministry of Social Development and the Royal Oman Police. The programme takes an integrated approach to identify the needs and build the capacities of female inmates, giving them opportunities for rehabilitation by helping them understand the concept of self-employment and productivity, with a view to the future possibility of establishing businesses and identifying market possibilities.

71. Oman provides opportunities for the entire population, including women, to participate in recreational activities, sports and cultural life. The Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth decreed that a seat on sporting federations had to be reserved for women in the period 2020–2024, thereby boosting the development of women's sport. The Women's Club for Sports and Cultural Creativity was established in October 2021 in addition to seven women's committees in existing sports clubs. Around 20 clubs have women's sports teams participating in the programmes run by the Department for Women's Sports, and Omani women have ranked highly in both local and international tournaments.

72. Oman celebrates Omani Women's Day each year on 17 October to highlight the status of Omani women and celebrate their contribution to development. The Day is an important occasion for women because, as His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik stated when he assumed the reins of government, "the partnership of citizens in forging the present and future of the country is one of the main bulwarks undergirding national action. We are determined that women should enjoy all their rights, as guaranteed by law, and work side by side with men in various fields in the service of their nation and their community". Since Omani Women's Day was first announced, many outstanding women have left luminous legacies and made distinguished contributions to the cause of sustainable development. The honours attained in the years between 2010 and 2023 include, most notably, that of Her Majesty Lady Ahad bint Abdullah Al-Busaidiyah, the wife of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, who conferred the Royal Order of Commendation on a number of outstanding women in 2021, also honouring 50 Omani women who have made great achievements and left important marks in various fields. Thus, the celebration of Omani Women's Day – which entails many different events and meetings – constitutes one of the most significant measures for the advancement of women.

73. Oman also participates in women-related events around the world, organizing events and workshops to mark, *inter alia*, Arab Women's Day, International Women's Day, the International Day of Action for Women's Health, the International Day of Rural Women and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

## Articles 4 and 5

### Derogations to obligations and limitations on rights under the Covenant

74. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights acquired force of law in Oman following accession under Royal Decree No. 46/2020. This is consistent with article 93 of the Basic Law of the State which stipulates that international charters and treaties have force of law once they have been ratified. Thus, those instruments have binding force on all units within the administrative apparatus of the State and on public or private legal persons following ratification and publication in the Official Gazette. Oman submits its periodic reports regarding its implementation of international treaties to the relevant treaty bodies, and it engages with the observations and recommendations those bodies then make. In fact, one of the principles that guides State policy is its adherence to international and regional covenants and treaties and to recognized norms of international law.

75. To underscore the country's commitment to its international obligations, article 97 of the Basic Law of the State stipulates that no regulations, decrees or directives may be issued that violate the international covenants or treaties that have come to be part of national law. Thus, all laws promulgated following the accession to or ratification of an international instrument by Oman must take due account of the country's obligations under that instrument. Similarly, everyone has the right to invoke the provisions of that instrument in any dispute that comes before the Omani courts. The Covenant was duly published in the Official Gazette, which means that knowledge of its provisions is to be taken for granted among all organizations and individuals who are subject thereto.

76. Article 5 (2) of the Covenant stipulates that it is inadmissible to restrict the rights contained therein or to impose any restriction upon or derogation from any of the fundamental human rights recognized in the country, even if they are not recognized by the Covenant. Oman therefore endeavours to ensure that its laws take due account of the economic, social and cultural rights enshrined in the Covenant without restricting them in any way. Moreover, the implementation of the Covenant at the national level does not restrict any existing economic, social and cultural rights on the pretext that they are not recognized by the Covenant.

77. On the subject of accepting international human rights standards, the 2019 common core document indicated that Oman is concerned to protect and promote human rights in general and, in particular, to fulfil its obligations under the human rights instruments which it has ratified or to which it has acceded. Oman works constantly to incorporate these rights into its national laws and legislation and to harmonize existing statutes with the instruments it has ratified.

78. Paragraph 60 of the 2019 common core document lists the treaties and protocols that Oman had ratified or acceded to by the end of 2017, namely: the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It also ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. In paragraph 61 of the common core document, Oman indicated that it agreed to take legal measures to accede to a further three international treaties, in line with recommendations it had accepted when its national human rights reports were being discussed. Those three treaties are: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The pledges of Oman in this regard have been duly fulfilled.

79. Thus, Oman has now acceded to seven of the core international human rights treaties and to the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Table 1 below lists the core treaties and protocols which Oman has ratified or acceded to, the date of ratification or accession and the relevant royal decree.

**Table 1 concerning the ratification of or accession to treaties and protocols by Oman**

<i>Instrument</i>	<i>Date of ratification or accession</i>	<i>Decree</i>
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1965	2 October 2003	Royal Decree No. 87/2002
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979	7 February 2006	Royal Decree No. 42/2005
Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989	9 December 1996	Royal Decrees Nos. 54/96 and No. 99/96
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006	Signed on 17 March 2008 and ratified on 6 January 2009	Royal Decree No. 121/2008
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography	17 September 2004	Royal Decree No. 41/2004
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	9 June 2020	Royal Decree No. 46/2020
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment	9 June 2020	Royal Decree No. 45/2020
International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance	12 June 2020	Royal Decree No. 44/2020

80. Alongside the core international treaties and protocols, Oman has also acceded to a number of other United Nations human rights instruments as well as to treaties regulating international and regional organizations. Most recently, on 21 March 2023, Oman acceded to the Arab Charter on Human Rights under Royal Decree No. 16/2023.

81. There has been no change in the position of Oman – as set forth in paragraphs 64 and 65 of the common core document – vis-à-vis amendments to human rights treaties. Oman ratified the amendment to article 43 (2) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, under Royal Decree No. 82/2002, and the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, under Royal Decree No. 3/2019.

82. However, as concerns reservations and declarations, there has been a change with respect to the information given in paragraph 66 of the common core document, specifically with regard to the reservations concerning the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In fact, on 30 June 2022, Oman notified the Secretary-General that it was withdrawing its general reservation that the Convention should be applied within the limits imposed by the material resources available. This means that it has just one reservation still in place, which concerns article 14 on freedom of religion. Following the withdrawal, under Royal Decree No. 3/2019, of the reservation to article 15 (4) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, there has been no further change in the reservations of Oman to that instrument.

83. The position of Oman in this regard changed again when it acceded to a further three core treaties in June 2020 because, at the moment of accession, it entered three reservations, one each to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

84. Lastly, as stated in paragraph 68 of the common core document, Oman has not made any declarations or applied any exceptions, restrictions or limits to the international treaties that it has ratified or to which it has acceded.

## **Article 6**

### **Right to work**

#### **Legislation and strategies**

85. Oman guarantees its citizens job opportunities and just working conditions. In that connection, article 15 of the Basic Law of the State stipulates: “Justice, equality and equal opportunities between citizens are the bedrock of society and are guaranteed by the State. ... Work is a right and a privilege, and citizens are free to engage in the work of their choice within the limits of the law. No citizen may be forced to work, save as required by law to perform a public service, for a specified period and for fair remuneration. The State is to enact laws to protect workers and employers, regulate relations between them and ensure safe and secure occupational health standards.”

86. Oman aspires to lay foundations for comprehensive and sustainable development that keeps pace with local and global advances in various fields. To this end it is pursuing the implementation of the Oman Vision 2040, which aims to create a labour market that attracts skills and that reflects and embraces demographic, economic, technological and knowledge-related changes. The Vision also highlights the importance of improving the legislation that regulates the labour market in order to align it with international labour standards.

87. In furtherance of the Government’s tenth five-year development plan (2021–2025), the Ministry of Labour has been striving to implement strategic directives aimed at advancing labour-market policies, providing facilities and support to the public and private sectors and directing its efforts towards the launch of employment initiatives, with a view to providing suitable openings for jobseekers.

88. Some of the most important pieces of legislation regulating labour in the Omani public sector are the Civil Service Act, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 120/2004, and its implementing regulations, promulgated by Ministerial Decree No. 9/2010. For its part, the Labour Act regulating work in the private sector was promulgated under Royal Decree No. 53/2023.

89. According to Royal Decree No. 89/2020, which concerns the mandate and organizational structure of the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry is to concern itself with the implementation and development of existing labour legislation, organizational aspects and the development of human resources in units of the State’s civilian administrative apparatus. It is also to regulate the labour market and the services provided to the private sector and to promote training and cooperation with international organizations and institutions.

#### **Employment**

90. Employment in the public and private sectors is overseen by the Government (the Ministry of Labour) which registers jobseekers, puts their names forward then monitors their employment in those sectors. The Ministry also monitors the supply and demand for national workers on the local labour market, and it seeks to strike a balance by creating job opportunities for all citizens who are seeking work or directing them to acquire the vocational skills the market requires. To this end, the Ministry has compiled a special workforce register. Recruitment processes are fair and transparent, and opportunities are available for all citizens who wish to compete for advertised positions.

### **Employment of migrant workers**

91. The Government (the Ministry of Labour) has signed 26 memorandums of understanding with labour exporting countries with a view to providing workers with legal protections prior to their recruitment. Also, the Government has laid an obligation on employers to engage workers only through accredited labour recruitment bureaux in the country, and it has coordinated with the workers' countries of origin to accredit their own bureaux and to take legal action against those that commit infractions. The Labour Code guarantees a body of rights for migrant workers, in particular, the freedom to move to another employer or to return to their own country if they so wish. In addition, the Code protects workers' wages via a wage protection programme, prohibits forced labour and human trafficking, admits the possibility of recourse to labour dispute tribunals and protects the right of workers to keep possession of their own identity documents. It also admits the possibility of joining a trade union and practising union activity such as the right to strike and to engage in collective bargaining, without discrimination. Lastly, the Code recognizes workers' right to occupational health and safety and to medical treatment. In order to ensure that all these provisions are effectively enforced, the Inspection Department in the Ministry of Labour monitors compliance with legislation and checks that recruitment bureaux are duly respecting their regulatory conditions. To this end, the Department conducts visits of inspection and applies sanctions to violators.

### **Training and employment initiatives**

92. One of the most important functions attributed to the Ministry of Labour under Royal Decree No. 89/2020 is that of training. According to paragraph 6 of the annex to the Decree, the Ministry is to monitor training plans and programmes in coordination with the competent authorities, while, according to article 15, it is to contribute to the development of training programmes in line with approved professional standards, to encourage on-the-job training and to help graduates take advantage of available job openings. Paragraph 19 states that the Ministry is to coordinate with other stakeholders to identify education and training priorities as well as labour market needs so as to ensure that strategic sectors and development projects are supported by the necessary skills at the national level. Paragraph 14 highlights the need to provide support to the institutions responsible for technical and vocational training in order to develop them, help them expand the reach and subject matter of the programmes they run and link their activities more closely to the needs of the labour market. For its part, article 26 of the Labour Code states that the competent authorities are to provide jobseekers with advice and guidance concerning the training they need to pursue to facilitate their employment.

93. The Royal Academy of Management, established under Royal Decree No. 2/2022, is a guiding beacon, a groundbreaking academic institution for leadership and operational administration, a seat of executive learning, a platform for developing management ideas and a centre for moulding empowered and capable national leaders who are able to expand the economic horizons of Oman in both the public and private sectors, in line with the requirements of the Oman Vision 2040. The Academy operates using an integrated system of initiatives and programmes within the "administrative competencies 2040" framework, the aim being to identify the administrative skills, knowledge and practices necessary to fulfil the Vision. To this end, the Academy runs four specialized centres: the "Centre of Governmental Leadership Development", the "Centre of Business Leadership Development", the "Centre of Local Governance" and the "Centre of Future Readiness". The operation of these Centres is guided by directives issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, which focus on improving the efficiency of the administrative apparatus of the State, underscoring the importance of the private sector, directing development towards the governorates and identifying the leadership and management priorities of the Oman Vision. The subject of training, bursaries and scholarships is addressed in section VII of the Civil Service Act.

94. The following table provides statistics on human-resource training activities conducted by the Ministry of Labour in 2022 and 2023.

**Table 2 concerning statistics on human-resource training activities conducted by the Ministry of Labour in 2022 and 2023**

Year	No. of State institutions	Cooperation with public sector institutions	Cooperation with private sector institutions	Cooperation with other countries
2022	36 institutions	8 initiatives	29 initiatives	245 scholarships
2023	36 institutions	7 initiatives	32 initiatives	157 scholarships

95. The training of private-sector workers is regulated by articles 20, 21, 22 and 104 of the Labour Code. A number of governmental entities run training, technical and vocational programmes, including the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation and the University of Technology and Applied Sciences. The Ministry of Labour provides support to institutions that deliver vocational education and training with a view to developing such education, increasing the number of programmes and subjects it offers and tying it into the needs of the labour market. To this end, the Ministry has been licensing “sectoral skills units” in professional associations to represent different economic sectors. So far, eight such units have been licensed. In addition to this, the Ministry has reached agreement on a programme with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, and it has concluded cooperation agreements with five sectoral units for them to undertake specific assignments in return for earmarked financial support. A manual concerning the creation of “sectoral skills units” was issued under Ministerial Decree No. 190/2022. The Government has also rolled out several initiatives to improve training and bridge the gap between jobseekers and the real needs of the labour market. In addition, the “*Tamkeen*” initiative, which was first announced in 2015, operates at the national level to build the modern digital skills that are in high demand on the market. The initiative, which targets graduates of both sexes, jobseekers and businesspersons, includes a programme to train female graduates and other women in communications and information technology.

96. In 2021, the Artificial Intelligence Academy launched a “women’s innovation package” to train women and girls in Oman in scientific research, technology and innovation, and encourage them to engage with and invest in the technologies of the fourth industrial revolution.

97. The Ministry of Social Development also seeks to integrate persons with disabilities into society and to habilitate them to compete for job openings, commensurate with their abilities and potential. For its part, the Ministry of Labour runs several vocational training programmes for workers, including one on workplace safety equipment for persons with disabilities and a train-the-trainer programme on economic empowerment and entry into the labour market.

98. Horticultural activities and handicrafts such as sewing have been introduced alongside traditional book-based activities for students with intellectual disabilities at the Fikriya School. A craft unit to teach children with visual disabilities how to make pottery and do other handicrafts has been established at the Omar ibn al-Khattab Institute for the Blind. The unit also serves students with intellectual disabilities at the Fikriya School and students with hearing disabilities at the Amal School for the Deaf. In addition to this, schools in the educational directorates in the governorates which apply the partial integration programme also provide vocational training for persons with disabilities as well as vocational guidance programmes for students with intellectual and hearing disabilities. The Ministry has appointed a vocational guidance expert for special education schools who implements the Ministry-approved vocational guidance programmes with a view to students gaining qualifications that allow entry to the labour market.

#### **Support for small and medium-sized enterprises**

99. Because of the vital role that small and medium-sized enterprises play in national economic growth, the Government seeks to support them, to encourage entrepreneurship and to provide a stimulating business environment. The Small and Medium-sized Enterprise

Development Authority, which came into being under Royal Decree No. 107/2020, provides a raft of services including, notably, entrepreneurship services, business incubators, marketing and product promotion services and a business readiness programme. The Small and Medium-sized Enterprise Development Authority has also launched a number of programmes and initiatives, including the Sanad service centre, the Craft Support initiative, the Business Academy platform and Business Opportunities platforms. The Government strives to provide effective and high-quality services to small and medium-sized enterprises, to which end the Ministry of Labour provides such businesses with the facilities they need, such as a wage subsidy initiative, an e-card for businesspersons, encouragement for students and graduates to enter business, the provision of business incubators and the creation of small and medium-sized enterprises.

100. Numerous innovative schemes – including the “Reefi” platform and the “Maksab” platform – seek to serve women and to enhance their role in social and economic development.

#### **Support for special economic zones and free zones**

101. The Government is committed to supporting special economic zones and free zones and to providing facilities and exemptions for the companies that operate there. The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, which was established under Royal Decree No. 105/2020, is responsible for overseeing six free zones. Oman is noteworthy for its progressive framework of laws and legislation regulating trade and investment as well as for its openness to global free trade markets, property rights and tax exemptions.

102. The Ministry of Labour has entered into a programme of cooperation with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones. This serves to encourage investment projects that contribute to training national personnel and enabling them to fill available posts; to increase job opportunities for Omani nationals in projects located in the zones under the supervision of the Public Authority; to create a national administrative, supervisory and technical workforce; to formulate training programmes coupled with employment for jobseekers; to find alternative solutions for workers who have lost their jobs; and to cooperate on workplace oversight and inspection.

#### **Sustainability of employment**

103. In July 2021, the Government launched a national employment programme with a view to finding sustainable employment solutions across all sectors in Oman. The programme, which is closely tied to the labour market and employment in the framework of the Oman Vision 2040, proposes a system of employment that keeps pace with change, finds radical and sustainable solutions to challenges and creates job opportunities based on innovation, future skills and the technologies of the fourth industrial revolution. This will involve the combined efforts of the Ministry of Labour and other governmental bodies, alongside private sector institutions. As part of the programme, specialized e-services such as “Marsad” and “Khatta” have been launched to provide decision-makers with detailed data about the labour market, jobseekers and students in various educational institutions. Several other initiatives have also been launched that aim to consolidate the link between supply and demand on the labour market.

#### **Policies to improve the work environment**

104. Within the context of the Oman Vision 2040, the Ministry of Labour has launched a raft of initiatives aimed at improving the workplace environment in the public and private sectors. These initiatives include the following: a national system for managing innovation and change, a government licensing system, a national framework project for professional skills, a job rotation initiative, a “beneficiary journey” initiative, an ISO quality standards system, a system for individual and organizational performance management, digital transformation systems, a wage protection programme, a new mechanism for job localization, a guide for businesses on commercial licensing services and a guide for individuals on private licensing services.

### **Labour disputes and settlement mechanisms**

105. In accordance with Royal Decree No. 35/2022 regarding the administration of the judiciary, complaints by public sector employees are heard before the administrative chambers of the competent courts. The Ministry of Labour also has a specialized department to receive staff complaints. The procedures whereby workers in the private sector can submit complaints is regulated by the Labour Act, according to which complaints are to be submitted to the competent office in the Ministry within a specified time period. The same Act also regulates how judges are to be assigned to the competent office in the Ministry to ensure the enforcement of settlements between parties to a complaint. If no settlement is reached, the complaint is referred to the competent court for it to consider and rule upon. The issue of arbitrary dismissal and the protection of workers' rights is also regulated under the Labour Act according to which a court, if it finds that a dismissal was arbitrary, can compel employers to reinstate a worker or to pay fair compensation.

### **Persons with disabilities**

106. According to article 24 of the Labour Act: "Employers who employ 40 or more workers are required to appoint professionally qualified persons with disabilities of Omani nationality in posts commensurate with their condition. The proportion of such workers is to be determined by decree of the Minister. Persons with disabilities who have been employed in accordance with the provisions of the preceding paragraph are to enjoy the same rights as other workers." As concerns work in the government sector, the Civil Service Council, in its session No. 2/2011, approved an increase in the proportion of persons with disabilities from 1 per cent to 2 per cent of the total number of positions to be filled in units of the administrative apparatus of the State and in other public bodies. For its part, the Ministry of Labour is also acting to accelerate the employment of persons with disabilities, in line with the Oman Vision 2040. In fact, the Ministry has encouraged the private sector to employ workers with disabilities, stipulating in Decree No. 362/2006 that: "For employers who employ a worker with a disability, that worker is to count as two workers when calculating the legally prescribed rate of 'Omanization' of private sector businesses."

107. The Labour Act provides security for workers with disabilities in the work environment. Article 12 (1) of the Act states: "The termination of a contract of employment on the part of an employer is to be considered as arbitrary dismissal if motivated on any of the following grounds: sex, origin, colour, language, religion, belief, social status or disability, or, for working women, pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding." Articles 29 and 30 of the regulations governing vocational health and safety measures in businesses subject to the Labour Act, issued under Ministerial Decree No. 286/2008, also envisage the protection of persons with disabilities. As of 2023, there were 11,080 workers with disabilities on the workforce. Table 1 in annex 1 of the present report shows the number of workers with disabilities (aged 15 and above) disaggregated by gender and sector, for the period 2020–2023.

## **Article 7**

### **Right to just and favourable conditions of work**

108. In article 3 of the Labour Act, (Royal Decree No. 53/2022), legislators established a requirement for employers to guarantee a minimum level of rights for their workers, as set forth in law. In articles 33–36 of the Act, legislators underscored the need for a contract of employment between worker and employer and described the most significant aspects of the labour relationship between the two parties. The Social Protection Act, promulgated under Royal Decree No. 52/2023, lists a body of different kinds of labour-related insurance, including insurance against workplace injuries and occupational diseases, employment security insurance, maternity leave insurance, sick leave insurance and extraordinary leave insurance. With a view to protecting the rights of migrant workers, article 61 of the Labour Act stipulates that such workers have an entitlement to an end-of-service indemnity. A system of savings for non-Omani workers, intended to be the basis for covering their end-of-service indemnities, is outlined in articles 135–144 in chapter IV of the Social Protection Act and articles 96–114 in chapter VI of the implementing regulations of the Act. The savings

programme can also be used as a support for retirement plans. It should be noted that the Labour Act sets forth the minimum conditions that employers must meet; these constitute basic rights which must be extended to all workers, and no agreement can be made that entails a violation of those rights.

### **Minimum wage**

109. Article 88 of the Labour Act stipulates that the minimum wage is to be determined by decree of the Minister of Labour after consultation with a joint dialogue committee that brings together the parties involved in the productive process, and after the approval of the Council of Ministers. The decree is issued following studies and an analysis of the condition of the labour market and the rate of inflation, also taking account of the social and material conditions of workers, its purpose being to improve the work environment and the economic situation of workers. The minimum wage can be increased through collective negotiations between parties to labour disputes and is enforced by the courts. The Labour Act purposes to set a minimum wage as an inviolable lower threshold, and workers and employers cannot make an agreement on the payment of a lower wage. It is, then, the minimum amount payable to a worker or employee for the work they perform, regardless of the skills required to undertake the work or the tasks it entails.

### **Equality of wages**

110. According to article 24 of the Labour Act: “All persons are entitled to equal wages, without discrimination between males and females.” Article 35 of the Civil Service Act also affirms that there is to be no gender distinction in salaries, and this is consistent with the Basic Law of the State which guarantees equality between women and men. Thus, all staff who are subject to the Civil Service Act receive a fair wage which reflects the value of the work they do, without discrimination, as set forth in the unified salary scales issued by Royal Decree No. 78/2013, which are applicable to staff in units of the administrative apparatus of the State and in public bodies. In this way, there is no gender-based discrimination in determining salary.

### **Promotion, leave and working hours**

111. Promotion in the public sector is based on merit, ability and seniority, and is to be decided by the head of unit (arts. 27–34 of the Civil Service Act). All staff have equal rights in terms of leave and rest periods of different kinds. The issue of leave and working hours is regulated in section X of the Civil Service Act. According to article 63 of the Act, staff are entitled to a period of annual leave on full pay while, according to article 67, staff are entitled to full pay during weekly days of rest. Article 68 states that staff who work on weekends or official holidays are entitled to be compensated either in the form of days off or of payment of two days’ salary for each day worked. It should be noted that section VI of the Social Protection Law, which concerns sick leave and extraordinary leave, is to come into force two years from the date of promulgation.

112. Under article 60 of the Civil Service Act, the Council of Ministers is to determine the number of official weekly working hours, taking account of the public interest. In the light of the working hours established by the Council of Ministers, the head of the Civil Service Council is then to issue a decree defining the beginning and end of working hours. In order to promote work, increase productivity and create a safe and secure workplace environment for staff, the Ministry of Labour issued Administrative Circular No. 5/2022 which concerns flexible working arrangements in the units of the administrative apparatus of the State that are subject to the Civil Service Act and its implementing regulations.

113. The Labour Act envisages numerous benefits for private sector workers, particularly in section IV which concerns wages, leave and working hours. Article 70 of the Act establishes a working week of 40 hours, while article 71 stipulates that workers are entitled to additional pay for hours worked outside the legally specified working week. This additional pay is to be 25 per cent of basic salary for daytime overtime and 50 per cent of basic salary for nighttime overtime. Overtime at weekends or on official holidays is to be compensated by employers with additional pay amounting to 100 per cent of basic salary. As an alternative, employers can grant their workers compensatory time off at the rate of one

day for each day worked at weekends or on official holidays. In all cases, the workers concerned must choose whether or not they agree to work the overtime. In article 77 of the Labour Act, legislators have stipulated that workers are entitled to a weekly rest period of not less than two consecutive days after five working days. Article 78 of the Act states that workers are entitled to annual leave with full pay for a period of not less than 30 days as well as a one-way ticket to spend their holiday in their country of origin. In addition, articles 82–84 of the Act regulate and govern all matters related to working hours, rest periods and leave of various kinds, be it regular leave, sick leave, maternity/paternity leave or leave without pay.

### **Additional benefits**

114. Under article 54 of the Labour Act, employers who employ 50 or more workers are required to draw up a list of labour regulations. In particular, the list is to include the organizational rules governing the operation of the business concerned; the rights and duties of employer and workers; the rules regulating the relationship between colleagues and with superiors; the rules surrounding promotion; the different categories of wages, bonuses and allowances and dates of payment; and the system of performance evaluation. Under article 55 of the Labour Act, employers who employ 25 or more workers are required to draw up a list of sanctions and the conditions under which such sanctions can be imposed (following a model issued by decree of the Minister). Employers are required to submit the list and any amendments made thereto to the Minister for approval.

### **Non-discrimination**

115. In order to ensure equality between all workers in Oman, both Omanis and non-Omanis, the Labour Act is consistent with international labour standards and human rights instruments regarding the importance of non-discrimination, particularly in the recruitment process. In fact, article 32 of the Act prohibits advertising, publicizing or classifying jobs on the basis of belief or colour, or in a way that is degrading to human dignity. Article 12 (1) of the Act states: “The termination of a contract of employment on the part of an employer is to be considered as arbitrary dismissal if motivated on any of the following grounds: sex, origin, colour, language, religion, belief, social status or disability, or, for working women, pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding.” Oman also seeks to ensure non-discrimination between men and women by integrating into legislation general provisions regarding promotion, wages and other entitlements. In fact, the Labour Act defines a “worker” as any natural person, without specifying the person’s sex. Thus, it follows that all the rights and guarantees contained in the Act are applicable without discrimination to both men and women. Procedures governing promotion in the public sector, which is governed by the principle of merit, are set forth in articles 27–34 of the Civil Service Act.

116. The State has laid great focus on the involvement of women in work, and equality between women and men is explicitly enshrined in article 15 of the Basic Law. Oman acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women under Royal Decree No. 42/2005 and to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination under Royal Decree No. 87/2002. Furthermore, national labour legislation is guided by international labour standards, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111). Under article 75 of the Labour Act, women may be employed to work during the night in circumstances and jobs to be specified by decree of the Minister. The employment of women in hazardous or arduous jobs, jobs that are harmful to health, etc. is likewise to be determined by decree of the Minister. Under article 76 of the Act, workers who are breastfeeding are granted one hour per day to care for their child, for a period of one year to begin at the end of the worker’s maternity leave. The worker herself may decide when to take this hour, which is to be counted as part of her working hours. Under article 83, a female worker may, at her own request, be granted leave without pay to care for her child for a period of up to one year. Special leave for female staff in the public sector – such as maternity leave, childbirth leave and nursery leave – is regulated in articles 79–81 of the Civil Service Act. According to article 60 of the Act: “Employers who employ 25 or more female workers are required to provide a dedicated rest area for women.” For its part, article 84 (10) envisages 98 days of maternity leave, which is to cover both the prenatal and postnatal periods. The

worker concerned is to be granted prenatal maternity leave at the recommendation of a competent medical authority for a period of up to 14 days, while the rest of the leave is envisaged for the period following the birth of the child.

117. The Act also makes provision for female staff members with disabilities, who are allowed to take early retirement with a discounted pension 15 years before the mandatory age of separation if they have at least 15 years of effective service with their disability. Workers with the same years of effective service can also request early retirement with an undiscounted pension, 10 years before the mandatory age of separation. Moreover, persons in this category can retire when their disability prevents them from being able to work, as established by a licensed medical authority. In this latter case, they are entitled to a retirement pension if, before the onset of their disability, they have contributed to disability insurance for at least 6 consecutive months or at least 12 non-consecutive months of which at least 3 months are consecutive.

118. Occupational health and safety are addressed in section VI of the Labour Act in a manner consistent with international standards, particularly ILO Occupational Safety and Health Conventions Nos. 155 and 187. Section IX of the Act focuses on the issue of labour inspections to monitor the application of occupational health and safety norms on the part of businesses. Under article 103 of the Act, the Minister of Labour is to issue a decree for the formation of an occupational safety and health committee as part of the Ministry. The decree also establishes the committee's mandate and rules of procedure. Article 104 of the Labour Act places an obligation on employers or their representatives to inform workers of possible occupational hazards and of the preventive steps they must take in that regard. It also requires the employer to act to protect workers from possible dangers to their health while performing their work, or the risks posed by machinery. Under article 106 of the Act, occupational safety and health regulations are to be issued by decree of the Minister of Labour following consultation with the three parties involved in the productive process (Government, employers and workers). The regulations are to include the following: general occupational safety and health measures applicable to all workplaces concerning lighting, ventilation and air renewal, drinking water, toilets, removal of dust and smoke, sleeping quarters for workers and precautions against fire. The Inspection Department and the Health and Safety Department of the Ministry of Labour, in coordination with the Ministry of Social Development, also monitor the extent to which business premises are suitable for persons with disabilities.

#### **Provisions for certain types of work: penalties for violating regulations**

119. The State is determined to uphold occupational safety and health requirements in places of work, as they constitute one of the most important aspects of the working environment. For this reason, specialized health and safety inspections are conducted in workplaces and production sites, in line with the Labour Act and with vocational health and safety regulations that aim to protect workers from work accidents and occupational diseases. Under Decree No. 286/2008, the Ministry of Labour issued regulations governing vocational health and safety measures in businesses subject to the Labour Act. The Ministry is currently amending those regulations in line with the current Labour Act and changes in the labour market.

120. Section IV of the Social Protection Act and section III of the Act's implementing regulations both address the subject of insurance against workplace injuries and occupational diseases. Such insurance covers all Omani workers in Oman and all types of employment contract, including fixed-term contracts, training contracts, part-time contracts, contractual workers and members of the Council of Oman and municipal councils. The insurance also covers non-Omani workers after three years from the date of issuance of the Social Protection Act, in accordance with categories, rules and conditions to be determined by decree of the Board of Directors of the Social Protection Fund.

#### **Combating forced and compulsory labour**

121. Oman acceded to the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), under Royal Decree No. 75/97 and to the ILO Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105), under Royal Decree No. 65/2005. In addition, under Royal Decree No. 37/2005, Oman

acceded to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its three supplementary protocols: the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air; and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition. It also acceded to the Arab Convention against Transnational Organized Crime under Royal Decree No. 6/2015 and ratified the 2006 Consolidated Maritime Labour Convention under Royal Decree No. 62/2021.

122. The Labour Act is consistent with the Trafficking in Persons Act in that it seeks to curb practices such as forced labour (which can amount to human trafficking), to increase penalties for persons perpetrating such actions and to improve governance and oversight on the use of migrant labour in Oman. The Government has signed memorandums of understanding with workers' countries of origin, which envisage periodic meetings with stakeholders with a view to regulating workforce recruitment and preserving workers' rights. The memorandums also include provision for the exchange of information between countries in order to prevent illegal recruitment and trafficking in persons. A new national plan of action to combat human trafficking 2021–2023 envisions the creation of a specialized anti-trafficking unit within the Inspection Department of the Ministry of Labour which is to be tasked with identifying instances of forced labour and ensuring that victims receive the necessary legal protection. The latest statistics concerning cases of human trafficking in Oman in 2023 are included in the following table.

**Table 3 concerning statistics on human trafficking cases for 2023**

Category of crime	No. of crimes	No. of Omani offenders			No. of migrant offenders		
		Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Human trafficking	12	0	3	3	2	33	35

123. The Government has introduced a series of important legislative amendments aimed at allowing migrant workers to move freely between employers. These include, notably, Decree No. 157/2020 amending certain provisions of the implementing regulations of the Foreigners' Residency Act. Specifically, the Decree amends article 24 of the Act by abrogating the requirement for workers to obtain a no-objection certificate before moving to another employer. Also under a ministerial decree, article 29 of the Labour Act now sets forth the rules allowing non-Omani workers to move from one job to another, the procedures employers are required to follow to report a non-Omani worker's change of employment and the obligations and penalties which employer and worker incur if they violate the provisions of the decree.

### **Protecting domestic workers**

124. According to article 2 of the Labour Code, the Minister of Labour is to issue a decree regulating this category of work, in accordance with international labour standards, especially the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). The Ministry of Labour has legislated the relationship between domestic workers and their employers, notably in the form of Decree No. 189/2004, which concerns workplace conditions for domestic workers and specifies the need for a written contract. This serves to regulate and document the working relationship, including the reciprocal rights and responsibilities of the two sides, such as monthly wages, holidays and food. In the case of any violation of those conditions, workers can appeal to the competent authorities. The Decree also requires employers to provide workers with free food, housing and healthcare, as well as a ticket to return to their country of origin at the end of the contract. It also envisages periods of rest during the day as well as a monthly period of rest, all to be stipulated in the contract of employment. The Ministry of Labour also issued Decree No. 1/2011, which regulates the employment of non-Omani workers and which includes an annex (form 3), which is the standard contract of employment for domestic workers. It should be noted, moreover, that the Labour Act does not exclude

domestic workers and that they therefore enjoy the same safeguards and rights as are legally guaranteed to other workers.

### **Labour inspection**

125. The Labour Inspection Department, which is part of the Directorate of Labour Welfare at the Ministry of Labour, monitors the implementation of labour-related legislation on the part of businesses. Section IX of the Labour Act focuses on the issue of labour inspections and working conditions, in which regard it draws on the principles enshrined in the ILO Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81). The same section of the Act also envisages the publication by the Minister of Labour of a guide for labour inspectors.

126. In pursuance of government directives to improve the inspection process, an “inspection unit” has been set up to make inspections and related tasks more efficient and effective, thereby strengthening the economy of Oman by increasing transparency and oversight and thus attracting investment.

### **Prohibition on work in the afternoon during summer**

127. The decree prohibiting work in the afternoon has a humanitarian underpinning that reflects the respect Oman shows for human rights in general and the rights of workers in particular. Article 70 of the Labour Act stipulates that employers must place a schedule of working hours and daily and weekly periods of rest on display in their business. The Minister is to issue a decree specifying the circumstances and jobs in which, due to technical reasons or operational conditions, it is necessary to continue working without a period of rest.

128. The regulations governing vocational health and safety measures in businesses subject to the Labour Act – issued pursuant to Ministerial Decree No. 286/2008 – also specify certain requirements and conditions governing places of work. Article 16 (3) (3) states that workers are not to be made to work in construction sites or outdoor locations during intense midday heat, specifically between 12.30 p.m. and 3.30 p.m. during the months of June, July and August of each year.

129. For its part, Ministerial Decree No. 322/2011 also envisages a number of safeguards for workers during the summer months. These include the provision of cold drinking water in quantities sufficient for all workers, a covered and air-conditioned rest area nearby (for openair locations), first aid, water for washing and other purposes and an air-conditioned bus.

130. The information given above shows that afternoon work is forbidden at certain hours and in certain months, due to the intense heat at that time of year. However, facilities providing essential public services can be exempted from these controls, in order not to affect their operation, on condition that they follow certain measures to protect their workers.

### **Size and trends in the workforce**

131. Table 4 shows the size of the workforce in Oman during the period 2020–2023.

Sector	Nationality	Year			
		2020	2021	2022	2023
Private sector	Omani	350 378	372 644	382 926	397 847
	Migrant	1 106 651	1 101 687	1 353 616	1 448 342
Government sector	Omani	349 200	351 231	365 163	376 856
	Migrant	43 842	41 641	44 058	44 178
Domestic sector	Omani	50 965	47 949	49 067	76 545
	Migrant	251 413	235 618	303 476	328 900
Charitable sector	Omani	1 265	1 940	1 825	1 921
	Migrant	4 134	4 975	5 212	4 866

Sector	Nationality	Year			
		2020	2021	2022	2023
Other	Omani	23	22	32	35
	Migrant	936	912	909	962
<b>Total</b>		<b>2 158 807</b>	<b>2 158 619</b>	<b>2 506 284</b>	<b>2 680 452</b>

### **Juvenile workers**

132. The phenomenon of juvenile workers does not exist in Oman. This matter is addressed in section V of the Labour Act, which is consistent with the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), ratified by Oman under Royal Decree No. 65/2005. In the same way, article 45 of the Children's Act prohibits the employment of children in work that is harmful to their health.

## **Article 8**

### **Right to form and join trade unions**

133. At the moment of its accession to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Oman entered a reservation to article 8 (1) (a) and (d) concerning the right to form trade unions and the right to strike in so far as government employees are concerned. Accordingly, Oman undertakes to implement article 8 of the Covenant in a manner compatible with that reservation.

134. Section VII of the Labour Act focuses on the issue of trade unions, sectoral unions and general federations of workers. The provisions of that section cover the right to form trade unions, sectoral unions and general federations of workers, the independent legal personality of such bodies and the purpose of their creation, which is to protect the interests of workers, defend their rights, improve their material and social conditions, represent them in all relevant matters and prevent the dismissal of any member for trade union activities.

135. Section 8 the Labour Act regulates the settlement of collective labour disputes, strikes and lockouts, in line with international labour standards as enshrined in the following conventions (which have not been ratified) the ILO Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87) and the ILO Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98). Under article 116 of the Labour Act, the Ministry is to establish labour dispute-settlement committees. The formation, functions and rules of procedure of such committees have been addressed in Decree No. 321/2024 of the Minister of Labour. The committees seek to achieve amicable solutions to the collective labour disputes with which they are faced. Article 121 of the Act envisages the creation of an arbitration committee for collective labour disputes. The committee, which is regulated under Ministerial Decree No. 320/2024, has a mandate to adjudicate the disputes that are submitted for its attention.

136. The issue of strikes and lockouts is addressed in articles 127–136 of the Labour Act, which set forth the procedures to be followed when exercising such rights. The Act also identifies the organizations in which it is forbidden to hold, call for or incite strike action, including oil facilities, oil refineries, ports, airports, public transport and other facilities to be determined by ministerial decree. In regulating this right, the Labour Act seeks to protect workers and to raise their cultural, professional and technical capacities via a system that defends their rights and improves the conditions in which they live and work, while also reflecting changes in international labour markets.

137. In order to ensure constructive social dialogue between all sides engaged in the process of work, article 140 of the Labour Act envisages the creation of a joint dialogue committee that brings together the parties involved in the productive process. The committee is responsible for studying proposals for the regulation of the labour market and for the promotion and consolidation of relations between the parties. It also examines developments in Arab and international labour standards with a view to benefiting therefrom, in the interests of better labour relations, and it promotes cooperation in order to increase production,

enhance competitiveness and strike a balance between the interests of workers and those of employers.

138. According to figures of the Department for Trade Union Organizations at the Ministry of Labour, there were 336 trade unions and 7 sectoral labour federations in Oman as of the end of 2023. This compares with 306 registered trade unions and 6 sectoral labour federations in 2021 and 323 trade unions and 6 sectoral labour federations in 2022.

## **Article 9**

### **Right to social security and social insurance**

139. In stages that reflect the progress of its economic development, Oman has, since the beginning of its renaissance in 1970, endeavoured to ensure dignified social protection for its citizens, in furtherance of the vision of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. In doing so, the State has taken account of one particular human rights principle, namely the right to social security. In fact, with a view to ensuring a life of dignity for citizens, social protection has been part of national development plans and programmes ever since 1970 July. This then took concrete form in the prerogatives granted to the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour in 1972. The same elements were also integrated into the Basic Law of the State, article 15 of which address the issue of social principles, stipulating: “The State is to provide citizens with social insurance as well as with assistance during emergencies and in sickness, disability and old age. ... The State is to promote social solidarity in bearing the burdens arising from disasters and adversity.”

#### **Social security**

140. The social security system is one of the longest standing and most important systems adopted by Oman to provide social protection for its citizens. It serves to support social groups with low living standards, providing them with an income that allows them to maintain their dignity. Work on the system began in 1973 and the first regulatory legal framework was enacted in 1977. This was subsequently updated under the Social Security Act, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 87/84, which envisaged support for eight different categories: widows, orphans, older persons, persons with disabilities, divorced women, unmarried daughters, families of convicts and abandoned families. The Act was subsequently amended under successive royal decrees, the most recent being Royal Decree No. 48/2009 which continued to regulate social security entitlements in Oman until the end of December 2023. The purpose of the social security system is to give financial assistance to individuals and families in need, to provide social protection to deserving groups and to integrate the various components of the social safety net. The system covers specific groups in society who do not have sufficient income or a designated breadwinner to support them.

141. Over the past five decades, the social security system in Oman has been notable for its flexibility, which has enabled it to evolve and keep pace with changes in the economic and social conditions of society. Indeed, allowances increase eightfold in the period between 1973 and 2011, as the lowest level of social security allowance, for individuals, went from RO 10 to RO 80, and the highest level, for families, went from RO 35 to RO 264.

142. Data shows that the number of beneficiaries of the social security system has increased, from 131 cases in 1973 to 72,836 cases in 2020. This covers around 4.8 per cent of citizens, with a total of 132,380 beneficiaries of different age groups. As a consequence, during that period, the total amount of money disbursed under the system went from RO 23,000 to around RO 109 million by the end of 2020.

143. In 2023, the social security system served 79,597 cases, with a total of 134,867 Omani beneficiaries of different age groups. This was accompanied by an increase in the volume of government and private investments in basic services, which have contributed to the development of governorates and provinces. The system has provided assistance and support to families on social security in vital areas such as health and education. The following table shows the number of cases/individuals and the amounts disbursed to social security beneficiaries during the period 2020–2023.

**Table 5 concerning number of cases/individuals and the amounts disbursed to social security beneficiaries during the period 2020–2023**

<i>Indicator</i>	2020	2021	2022	2023
1 Cases benefiting from social security	72 836	72 675	74 486	79 597
2 Individual beneficiaries of social security	132 380	129 475	130 267	134 867
3 Amounts disbursed to beneficiaries of social security	108 909 979	109 828 261	117 258 380	122 178 206

144. Since the ultimate goal of the social security system is to provide temporary financial assistance to beneficiaries until they have the economic capacity to break the cycle of destitution and poverty, a raft of policies and programmes has been rolled out that is intended to help social security recipients become independent of the system and rely on other sustainable sources of income. These initiatives include allocating 1,277 places in higher education, both in Oman and abroad, for children of limited-income families on social security in the academic year 2020/21. This includes 367 full scholarships to be allocated by competition among the children and 11 full internal scholarships. The policies also envisage giving priority to the employment and training of children from families on social security. In addition to this, families under social protection are being given up to RO 1,000 by the Ministry of Social Development to start a home-based business as an additional source of income. Such families are then monitored and provided with the technical and administrative support they need to establish their businesses. This category of persons is also eligible for other benefits, such as exemption from fees for certain public services and financial and in-kind assistance in cases of emergency or natural disaster.

#### **Social assistance in emergencies and special circumstances**

145. In line with regulations issued by the Ministry of Social Development under Decree No. 72/2014, support is given in special circumstances, emergencies and disasters in the form of cash or in-kind assistance provided on a temporary basis to families living under the social security umbrella. Emergency assistance is granted in cases where individuals or families on limited incomes have to face unforeseen and uncontrollable social or economic circumstances that are harmful and cannot be met by their normal income. For its part, disaster assistance is provided in circumstances where citizens suffer losses in money, property or livelihood as a result of weather events of various kinds.

146. According to official statistics, between 1977 and the end of 2020, around RO 12.9 million was disbursed in cash as disaster assistance in 48,601 individual and collective cases, not including housing and other forms of compensation. The total amount of annual government assistance provided to Omani families between 1973 and 2020 (including social security, relief and disaster assistance) amounted to some RO 1.8 billion. This does not include allowances paid to individuals and families to connect to electricity and water supplies or financial subsidies to persons suffering from chronic conditions such as kidney failure.

147. Assistance is also provided on a monthly basis, in line with the aforementioned regulations, with 38,714 beneficiaries as of the end of 2023. Furthermore, assistive devices are provided to all citizens who are determined by the medical authorities to be in need thereof, subject to certain controls and to a doctor's report.

#### **Social insurance programmes**

148. Pension funds and social insurance systems are among the most significant preventive social protection programmes in Oman. They serve to insure against old age, disability, death, widowhood, orphanhood, workplace injuries and occupational diseases through periodic contributions from workers, employers and the State. Thanks to their diversified investments, the funds also play an important role in economic development.

149. Oman has enacted a body of laws to regulate the operation of the funds. These include the Post-Service Pensions and Benefits for Omani Government Employees Act, promulgated under Royal Decree No. 26/86, and the Social Protection Act, promulgated under Royal Decree No. 52/2023. Under a decree on the extension of insurance protection, issued at the twenty-fifth session of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), held in December 2004, the benefits of the funds were extended to include citizens working in GCC countries.

### **Employment security scheme**

150. The employment security fund is one of the most recent social protection systems in Oman. It was established in March 2020 and its rules of procedure were promulgated in August 2020 under Royal Decree No. 82/2020. The system embraces the principle of social solidarity by providing social protection for citizens who lose their jobs for reasons beyond their control. This fund has become part of the overall system envisaged in the Social Protection Act.

### **Social housing programmes**

151. Oman has adopted a policy of distributing land to citizens for various uses, including residential, agricultural, commercial and industrial. The policy has a number of goals, notably that of ensuring the sustainability of development in provinces and governorates, and enabling citizens to settle in the areas in which they reside, something that in turn supports the stability of families and society. Since 1970, Oman has established three types of social housing programme:

- *Land distribution policy*: This policy has contributed to the high rate of home ownership among Omani families, which has reached 91 per cent according to a 2019 Oman household expenditure and income survey. Ownership rates range from around 78 per cent in the governorate of Buraymi to 97 per cent in South-eastern and Al-Wusta governorates. In all, 741,235 plots of land were given to citizens during the period 1980–2020, for various uses. Of these, 90 per cent were residential plots distributed in various governorates, and this led to an increase in land ownership by families in Oman to 84 per cent in 2020. Royal Decree No. 42/2021 regulates the allocation of government lands.
- *Social Housing and Housing Assistance Programmes*: These programmes serve to provide housing units for Omanis on low- and middle-incomes, under conditions and within legal frameworks set forth in the relevant royal decrees, including the Social Housing Act promulgated by Royal Decree No. 37/2010. In the period 1981–2023, a total of 15,648 families in various governorates benefited from the programme.
- *Housing Loan Programmes*: The Oman Housing Bank provides facilitated loans for citizens who meet the relevant conditions.

### **Social protection**

152. Under the new era inaugurated under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, social security policies and programmes have expanded to include social protection. This means that, in addition to various forms of social security, policies, strategies and programmes have been devised that aim to ensure an adequate standard of living for different groups, in a society where all persons are able to enjoy their economic, social and cultural rights at every stage of life, regardless of the circumstances in which they were born or the challenges they have to face. In this way, Oman has created a social protection umbrella to ensure dignity for citizens, now and in the future, achieve social well-being and ensure a decent life for everyone. More than 1.5 million citizens benefit from the social protection system.

153. In pursuance of the Oman Vision 2040, Royal Decree No. 33/2021 was issued to restructure the pension and social protection systems. Oman, in fact, was one of the first countries to restructure its pensions, reform its social protection systems and incorporate the associated institutions, which it did simultaneously and in record time. The Social Protection Act and its implementing regulations promulgated pursuant to Ministerial Decree No. 7/2023

focus on two aspects; firstly, the monetary benefits of social protection, which will replace social security programmes and which are funded entirely by the State; and secondly, social insurance (retirement) programmes, which are based on contributions from employers and workers.

154. With the allocation of an additional annual RO 400 million in support from the State, financial allocations for the social protection system now amount to RO 1.4 billion. The annual outlay of social protection benefits is in excess of RO 500 million; this is directly funded by the State and does not come from contributions. In determining which categories are to be excluded from the new retirement conditions, the Social Protection Act takes due account of the system for compensating years of service used in previous regulations. The Act includes flexible provision for personal decisions to take early retirement, with mechanisms that ensure that other groups are not burdened with higher contributions. Within three years of the promulgation of the Social Protection Act, there will be a mandatory savings programme for non-Omanis; the programme will be optional for Omanis, who can use it to increase their post-retirement benefits or to build up savings to enable them to opt for early retirement without requesting a discounted pension.

155. Social protection programmes aim to address the risks associated with different aspects of the life cycle. These are proactive programmes designed to provide multiple levels of coverage to protect target groups. Most of the provisions of the Social Protection Act came into effect on 1 January 2024, while the new retirement conditions became applicable – under the pension and social protection regulations issued pursuant to Royal Decree No. 33/2021 – from the day after the Act was published in the Official Gazette. The new retirement conditions apply to all categories except for those who completed 20 years' service before the issuance of the Social Protection Act and met the retirement conditions under the previous system.

156. Social insurance programmes are applicable to Omanis of the following categories: government functionaries, staff of units of the administrative apparatus of the State, workers in the private sector or self-employed, etc. They are also applicable to Omanis working in GCC States and abroad as well as to other Omanis who enrol voluntarily. The normal retirement age for all categories is 60 years, although certain categories are subsidized with non-discounted pensions, such as women (55 years), persons with disabilities (50 years) and persons engaged in arduous or dangerous work (55 years for men, 50 years for women). Work in the military is limited by decree to the age of 55. Table 2 in annex 1 of the present report shows the number of beneficiaries of social protection benefits, as of January 2024.

## **Article 10**

### **Protection for families, mothers and children**

157. Article 15 of the Basic Law of the State focuses on the family, which it describes as the foundation of society. Moreover, the State is to work to ensure family cohesion and stability and to consolidate family values. It is also to ensure the welfare of children and persons with disabilities and to provide citizens with social insurance, as well as assistance in cases of emergency, illness, disability and old age.

158. National law and legislation – such as the Personal Status Act, the Social Protection Act, the Children's Act, the Labour Act and many others – envisage protection for families and assistance in the raising of children.

159. The Ministry of Social Development works to empower, promote, protect and preserve the cohesion of families, running targeted plans and projects intended to provide them with a conducive environment in which to thrive. The Ministry runs social programmes and provides services such as guidance and counselling for families suffering socioeconomic difficulties or mental-health problems. The purpose of such services is to reduce or contain problems and to find appropriate solutions in order to enable families to live with greater stability in the face of external influences and rapid change.

160. As concerns equality of marriage rights between men and women, the provisions of the contract of marriage are regulated by the Personal Status Act. Contracts can be stipulated

only with the woman's consent; such consent, in fact, is one of the main elements of the contract, without which it cannot be concluded. In order to build awareness among both men and women, the Ministry of Social Development and partner organizations is rolling out the national "*Tamasuk*" programme which – taking due account of legal, health, social, economic and legal aspects – seeks to provide young persons of both sexes with the knowledge and skills they need to build a strong marital relationship.

161. Article 27 of the Children's Act upholds a child's right to survival, development and education, within a framework of freedom and human dignity. Responsibility for this lies with the child's guardian, while the State acts to ensure that guardians fulfil their obligations in that regard, by providing assistance and developing institutions, facilities and services for the care and development of the child, as prescribed by law.

162. In order to provide social protection to members of society and ensure their well-being, as prescribed in the Basic Law of the State and the Oman Vision 2040, the Social Protection Act makes provision for the creation of an integrated protection system that includes programmes and instruments intended for all social groups. The Act, indeed, envisages social protection benefits in several forms, including: a benefit for older persons, for persons with disabilities and for orphans and widows as well as a childhood benefit and a family income benefit.

163. The Labour Act explicitly upholds the principle of equality between male and female workers and states that its provisions apply equally to both, without discrimination. The Act also includes provisions that serve to underline the role that women have in family life. In that regard, it envisages paid maternity leave for women to cover the prenatal and postnatal periods. The relevant provisions are set forth in article 84, which envisages 98 days of maternity leave, which is to cover both the prenatal and postnatal periods. The worker concerned is to be granted prenatal maternity leave at the recommendation of a competent medical authority for a period of up to 14 days, while the rest of the leave is envisaged for the period following the birth of the child. Under article 76 of the Act, workers who are breastfeeding are granted one hour per day to care for their child, for a period of one year to begin at the end of the worker's maternity leave. The worker herself may decide when to take this hour, which is to be counted as part of her working hours. Also, in order to encourage shared parental leave, the Act envisages 7 days of paternity leave. This is consistent with general comment No. 16 (2005) of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights, and with general comment No. 19 (2007) on the right to social security.

164. On the subject of assistance for children and adolescents, and protection against any form of socioeconomic exploitation, the Children's Act includes guarantees for their economic rights (arts. 43–50) and social rights (arts 25–29, 34 and 35), while the Labour Act guarantees the rights of juvenile workers (arts. 100–102).

165. In its tenth five-year development plan, Oman set itself the strategic goal of providing "integrated social protection for the most vulnerable groups to enable them to become self-reliant and contribute to the national economy." A strategic programme was created to this end to ensure "greater and more effective contributions to the system of empowerment in the Oman economy."

166. Oman provides rehabilitative services for persons with disabilities, beginning at an early age. As of the end of 2023, there were 94 rehabilitation centres in all, subdivided as follows: 28 State-operated centres, 11 charitable centres and 55 private centres. The Ministry of Social Development provides social assistance services, and it issues "disability cards" which confer certain privileges and advantages on persons with disabilities such as special parking places and exemption from registration fees for treatment in clinics and hospitals. Civil society groups, notably disability associations and private sector companies, provide the Ministry with social and financial support and seek to secure housing for persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning uses social housing and facilitated loans to assist persons with disabilities who apply for a plot of land on which to build a home for their family.

167. Motivated by a desire to assist persons with disabilities, the Diwan of the Royal Court has set up a social welfare department which oversees staff with disabilities and provides

them with the services they require, without discrimination. In addition, the Diwan has set up a section to serve retired persons, which also provides support and assistance for persons with disabilities, monitors their condition and seeks to facilitate their lives. For its part, the Diwan's health complex provides treatment for retired staff members, who also enjoy the services provided by a number of recreational clubs. The Ministry of Defence runs its own social protection programmes, with a particular focus on retired persons with disabilities. Activities include field visits to persons with disabilities in their homes or in military hospitals, recreational trips, the annual Umrah pilgrimage and handicraft workshops. Monetary compensation is provided annually for insuring and renewing vehicles for persons with disabilities, and such persons are also provided with financial assistance for construction, restoration and maintenance work as well as for various other needs, such as furnishings and electronic goods, paying bills, wheelchairs and registering, renewing and insuring vehicles.

168. Children with disabilities are able to enjoy their rights under the Conventions, as the Children's Act guarantees all their rights in a manner consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The practice of corporal punishment is prohibited under the Act, which criminalizes violence or abuse against a child, irrespective of whether the child has or does not have a disability. Anyone found to have abused or used violence against a child faces severe penalties of up to 15 years' imprisonment and a fine of RO 10,000.

169. The Criminal Code (Royal Decree No. 7/2018) envisages severe penalties for crimes against persons with disabilities. Article 257 of the Code states: "Anyone who has non-consensual sexual intercourse with another (male or female) is liable to a term of imprisonment of between 10 and 15 years. The penalty is imprisonment for life if the victim is under the age of 15 or has a physical or mental disability that would render them incapable of opposing resistance." Article 258 reads: "Anyone who indecently touches another (male or female), without consent, is liable to a term of imprisonment of between 1 and 3 years. The penalty is to be a term of imprisonment of between 5 and 7 years if the victim has a physical or mental disability that would render them incapable of opposing resistance."

170. The Ministry of Social Development has set up a social welfare home in Rustaq to house older persons who have no relatives or anyone to look after them. As of the end of 2022, the home had 46 residents who are provided with all the services they require. A further 4,389 older persons and their families receive social services via a homecare programme. At the same time, the Child Welfare Centre looks after children who have been deprived of the care of their natural family. The Centre provides them with full bed and board in addition to educational, social, cultural and recreational programmes as well as other activities for children and adolescents. As of the end of 2022, 86 children – 43 boys and 43 girls – were residing in the Centre. In addition to this "youth integration homes", for boys aged between 14 and 20, currently have 72 residents.

171. Oman has made every effort to protect children from abuse and exploitation. To this end, a number of departments have been created as part of the Ministry of Social Development, including the Children's Department, which monitors children's rights, the Family Protection Department and the Family Guidance and Counselling Department. The Child Welfare Centre looks after children who have been deprived of family support, while a "protection home" exists to protect children from abuse. A main child protection committee has been set up that has subcommittees at the governorate level across Oman; child protection delegates have been appointed and the 1100 child protection hotline has been opened. The aforementioned committees and activities are overseen by the Ministry of Social Development with the assistance of other relevant bodies, including the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Office of the Public Prosecution, the Royal Oman Police and charitable organizations.

172. Oman seeks to defend the rights of children and to protect them from any form of economic or social exploitation, using mechanisms developed for that purpose in laws and legislation, including the following:

- *Child protection committees*: Under the Children's Act, a main child protection committee has been set up and charged with a number of functions. These include developing child protection policies and supervising the implementation of these

policies by the relevant committees, reviewing child-related legislation, expressing opinions on draft laws and decrees, proposing the necessary legislation in this field and supervising the work of child protection subcommittees in the governorates. All these committees are mandated to receive complaints and reports of any violation of children's rights such as violence, exploitation or abuse.

- *Child protection delegates*: Under Ministerial Decree No. 43/2016, child protection delegates have been appointed in all the country's governorates with the task of applying the Children's Act and its implementing regulations. In pursuit of this goal, their mandate allows them to receive complaints and reports of violations such as violence, ill-treatment or exploitation of children; to take action to protect children; to draw up tailored intervention plans with the aim of protecting children and rehabilitating and reintegrating them into society, in coordination with specialists; and to report cases to the child protection committee. The Ministry of Education has also drawn up a guide for schools on how to protect students from abuse.
- *Child protection hotline (1100)*: The hotline was launched in January 2017 as a free round-the-clock service which receives reports from children themselves, from their representatives or from third parties. Its purpose is to protect children from all forms of violence, abuse or neglect, to provide urgent services and to help monitor cases of child abuse by studying its causes and examining ways to treat it and prevent its recurrence.
- *Call centre (1555)*: The centre, which opened in August 2022, handles general inquiries and inquiries concerning applications. In addition, it receives reports of child abuse and of child begging, provides family guidance and counselling services and receives suggestions and complaints.
- *Reconciliation spaces*: These are locations designed for children whose parents have separated, where family meetings can take place in optimal circumstances and without the conflicts that often mark encounters between divorced parents. The spaces also seek to create an atmosphere conducive to fostering a direct and continuous relationship between the child and the parents. In this connection, the relevant departments of the Ministry of Social Development coordinate with the competent courts.
- *Temporary care home*: This is one of the protection mechanisms designed for the placement of children who suffer violence, exploitation or abuse, where they can receive the care and rehabilitation they need until the reasons that caused their placement have been dealt with. During the placement period, the children are provided with a range of health, educational and recreational services, in addition to psychological and legal support.

### Trafficking in persons

173. Oman enacted the Trafficking in Persons under Royal Decree No. 126/2008, after which the National Commission to Combat Human Trafficking was formed by decree of the Council of Ministers issued in 2009 under article 21 of the Act. The Commission is headed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and has a membership made up of representatives from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, the Royal Oman Police, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Health, the Office of the Public Prosecution, the Supreme Court, the Oman Human Rights Commission, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the General Federation of Oman Workers. The Commission submits a periodic report to the Council of Ministers detailing national efforts to combat trafficking in persons.

174. As explained in the 2019 common core document, trafficking victims benefit from free medical and legal care, access to shelters, and legal and social assistance. A dedicated shelter for such victims has been established, and the public has been made increasingly aware of the human trafficking issue through radio and television programmes and articles in the press. The Royal Oman Police and other authorities help in providing information, advice and support through free hotlines for victims, and non-Omani victims are permitted to remain in Oman until the completion of all legal proceedings, if they so wish. The National

Commission to Combat Human Trafficking cooperates closely with the Oman Human Rights Commission. National efforts to combat human trafficking have made considerable progress.

175. Under Administrative Decree No. 50/2017, the Office of the Public Prosecution set up a special department to investigate and prosecute cases of human trafficking. The new department is staffed with specialized and qualified prosecutors whose job it is to investigate trafficking cases, bring charges then prosecute those cases before the courts. In 2019, the National Commission to Combat Human Trafficking established a rapid intervention task force with members drawn from the competent bodies. The new task force conducts proactive investigations in order to favour a rapid response and to support victims, using the national mechanisms available to that end. Statistics from 2023 show that just two cases of human trafficking entailed placement in the “Dar al-Wifaq” facility run by the Ministry of Social Development. The facility exists to provide immediate protection for trafficking victims, assess their state of psychosocial and physical health and provide treatment and rehabilitation.

176. As noted in the core document, the National Commission to Combat Human Trafficking prepared a national plan for the period 2018–2020 and elaborated procedures for assisting trafficking victims. The Commission reviewed the first plan of action and the successes it had achieved, before developing a new plan of action for the period 2021–2023. The aim of the new plan is to find appropriate solutions and strategies to address, prevent and combat the phenomenon of trafficking in all its forms; protect victims as envisaged in the Trafficking in Persons Act; reinforce regional and international cooperation in this field; embrace and adopt best practices; and running regular training to build the capacity of the bodies responsible for monitoring, investigating and providing care.

177. In its combined third and fourth reports ([CRC/C/OMN/3-4](#)) and its combined fifth and sixth reports ([CRC/C/OMN/5-6](#)) under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Oman stated that there were no cases of the sale or trafficking of children in the country. Nonetheless, Omani legislation includes provision for the offences stipulated in articles 2 and 3 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention. In fact, article 254 of the Criminal Code envisages penalties for anyone who incites, lures, seduces or assists a person into prostitution or depravity using any means, where such action leads to the commission of a crime, if the victim is under the age of 18 or if the perpetrator is an antecedent of the victim, is responsible for the care of the victim or has authority over the victim. Similar provisions are also to be found in articles 2, 3 and 5 of the Human Trafficking Act, articles 56 and 72 of the Children’s Act and articles 14, 15, 22 and 23 of the Cybercrime Act.

178. The fourth periodic report submitted by Oman under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ([CEDAW/C/OMN/4](#)) includes updated information about the efforts of the National Commission to Combat Human Trafficking, which in the period 2018–2020 worked to build capacity among personnel involved in combating trafficking by organizing regular training courses and lectures for staff at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, diplomats in Omani embassies, law enforcement agencies, civil society groups and international organizations.

179. In order to support the National Commission to Combat Human Trafficking, judicial and administrative divisions specializing in human trafficking cases have been established in law enforcement agencies inside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Royal Oman Police, the Ministry of Labour and the Office of the Public Prosecution. The National Commission to Combat Human Trafficking also cooperates closely with the Oman Human Rights Commission. Round-the-clock hotlines have been opened in both Arabic and English to report such offences. Translators for other languages are also available.

## **Article 11**

### **Right to an adequate standard of living**

180. Over the course of more than fifty years, Oman has pursued development with tangible results and has achieved high rankings on international indicators and in human development reports, both in the Arab world and globally. In fact, Oman has made outstanding progress on the Human Development Index, rising from 0.36 in 1970 to 0.81 in 2020, an increase of more than 130 per cent. This moved the country from the ranks of the

least developed nations to that of the most developed. Oman has made significant progress in all areas of human development, particularly in health and education. According to the Human Development Index, Oman ranks among the 58 countries with very high human development, making it one of the countries that has most effectively achieved development for its population.

181. Oman has also made significant progress in eradicating poverty. In fact, there is no extreme poverty in the country, and no one who lives on less than \$1.9 per day. The reason for this lies in the provision of basic services, particularly education and healthcare, free of charge for citizens and at nominal costs for residents. In 2019, Oman had a Gini coefficient of 30.1 per cent (30.8 per cent in urban areas and 28.6 per cent in rural areas). It should be noted, also, that Oman has a social protection umbrella to provide dignity for citizens, now and in the future, achieve social well-being and ensure a decent life for everyone, in line with the Basic Law of the State and the Oman Vision 2040. The objective is to achieve comprehensive development that has a positive effect on citizens' lives by providing decent livelihoods, improving living standards and responding to aspirations for progress, security and prosperity. Strategies and programmes intended to achieve this objective focus on four main areas: The geographical (regional) dimension so as to achieve balanced development between governorates; the promotion of urban centres and the closure of the development gap; the creation of a comprehensive multisectoral safety umbrella for citizens so as to provide sufficient insurance coverage for different social groups; and the creation of a national programme for the digital economy.

182. The Social Protection Fund constitutes a comprehensive safety umbrella for citizens in various sectors, reflecting the great concern that Oman has to combat poverty and to use its laws, regulations, legislation and other initiatives to create a just, inclusive and caring society. Oman runs protection and welfare programmes for families deserving of social and material support (in emergencies and special circumstances) under the (abrogated) Social Security Act. Indeed, the provision of monthly payments to the eight categories envisaged in that Act is one of the main components of the social safety net in Oman. Social assistance is also provided on a monthly basis under the regulations governing social support, issued under Ministerial Decree No. 72/2014. In 2020, social assistance benefits were disbursed in a total of 405,327 cases, and in 38,714 cases in 2023.

183. The Social Protection Act envisages benefits in several forms, including a benefit for older persons, for persons with disabilities and for orphans and widows as well as a childhood benefit and a family income benefit. The aim of the Social Protection Fund is to enact the social protection vision and policies of Oman and to provide decent, fair and adequate insurance coverage and protection for different social groups.

184. Since 2015, national indicators have shown a steady increase in the proportion of total government spending on basic services such as education, vocational training, healthcare and social services. Effective government spending on these services reached 20.3 per cent of the approved budget in 2019 while, in 2022, spending on basic infrastructure reached 28.9 per cent. In the field of healthcare, the Government is working to reduce the overall maternal mortality rate to fewer than 70 per 100,000 live births, to prevent all avoidable deaths of newborns by 2030 and to reduce the under-five mortality rate to 25 per 1,000 live births. This also entails raising awareness about family planning services and integrating reproductive health into national strategies and programmes by 2030. To date, Oman has reached, or is close to reaching the targeted levels of achievement by 2030 under most health and well-being targets, particularly in the areas of maternal and child health and the control of epidemic diseases. Oman is also on track to achieve universal health coverage, including access to high-quality basic healthcare services and universal access to safe, effective, affordable and high-quality medicines and vaccines.

#### **Right to sufficient food**

185. Oman is striving to achieve food security for all its citizens, to nourish them, promote awareness about food and underscore the importance of food security as a pillar of sustainable development. The State is also taking measures to overcome the challenges facing farmers, and it is embracing modern technologies, supplying agricultural inputs, providing guidance

to farmers and encouraging them to use environmentally friendly pesticides and rationalize their water consumption.

186. Collective procurement contracts have been concluded as well as contracts for the marketing and distribution of Omani agricultural produce at home and abroad. This is in addition to other initiatives that serve local farmers. The Oman Agricultural Association also plays a role in the production, marketing and development of the country's fish resources, providing services to Association members and contributing to their socioeconomic improvement as part of an overarching plan. In doing so, it acts in accordance with locally and internationally recognized principles for the preservation of fish resources, with a view to ensuring sufficient food, now and in the future.

187. Oman has developed a comprehensive food security strategy 2020–2040, which incorporates a set of goals most of which are intended to improve national food security in terms of production, importation, storage and distribution. The strategy covers three main areas: demand for food, local food production and securing imports from abroad.

188. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is pursuing a number of investment projects in the field of food security (agriculture, livestock, fisheries and water resources) in order to increase local production, move towards self-sufficiency, provide job opportunities and resolve operational challenges. The Ministry is also running research projects on the preservation of genetic diversity and improvement of quality in seeds, crops and livestock. These projects include:

- A research programme on the creation and use of agricultural production technologies to enhance the competitiveness of local agricultural produce.
- A research programme to increase the production and quality of honey.
- A research programme on genetic engineering and molecular technology with a view to the development of cash crops.
- A research programme to develop and increase the tissue culture of palm seedlings and other major agricultural crops in order to supply the agricultural sector with local and imported varieties.
- A research programme for the conservation, maintenance and sustainable use of animal genetic resources and the management of gene banks to ensure sustainability.
- A research programme to improve the productivity of agricultural lands, maximize the economic returns of farms affected by salinity and protect them from degradation.

189. The Government encourages citizens to work and invest in agriculture and animal husbandry, to which end it provides land for the establishment of economically viable projects capable of producing affordable food that is free of harmful substances and is of sufficient quality and quantity to meet the nutritional needs of everyone in Oman. In this regard, the Government has rolled out a range of sustainable consumption and production programmes, including one on pest control and the use of technology in production processes. This helps to preserve agricultural produce, reduce the damage caused by pests, optimize the use of agricultural resources and ensure sustainability. In addition, the Government is developing and updating laws and implementing regulations that regulate agriculture, in order to maintain the sustainability of production and ensure food safety.

190. Oman ranked thirty-fifth globally and fifth in the Arab world in the 2022 Global Food Security Index, published by the British magazine *The Economist* in September 2021. The Index, which includes 113 countries, is based on evaluation criteria derived from globally recognized food security indices, namely: food accessibility, food abundance, food sustainability and adaptation.

#### **Right of access to water**

191. Oman has enacted a number of laws and pieces of legislation to regulate water resources, and it is cooperating with its strategic partners in the governmental and private sectors to ensure supplies of safe and high-quality drinking water and sanitation services in all governorates, in line with available capabilities and at a reasonable cost. The construction and use of dams, quite apart from their importance to the water supply, has to take account

of the need to protect and restore ecosystems. Several projects and initiatives have been rolled out to introduce, evaluate and disseminate the use of modern irrigation technologies as well as research programmes to maximize the economic productiveness of water and to use non-conventional water sources to enhance agricultural production. These initiatives, which include a national programme to harvest water for agriculture, reflect the importance Oman attaches to ensuring that all residents in all governorates have access to clean and affordable drinking water. In 2019, 99.8 per cent of the population benefited from safely managed drinking services, and that figure went up to 100 per cent in 2023.

192. Oman has been updating and developing its laws in this regard, including the Water Resources Protection Act, promulgated under Royal Decree No. 29/2000 and its implementing regulations, which are consistent with the Oman Vision 2040. The State is currently drafting a law to regulate water and sanitation in order to build sewerage networks that meet global standards. Oman has also acted to regulate the water sector with laws and regulations to protect against pollution and depletion and to secure clean water sources and sanitation services for everyone. These laws and regulations include:

- The Water and Sanitation Regulation Act and its implementing regulations, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 40/2023.
- The Act to regulate and protect Aflaj irrigation systems, which are World Heritage sites, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 39/2017.
- The Act on the regulation and privatization of the electricity sector and its associated water sector, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 78/2004.
- The Act to protect drinking water sources from pollution, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 115/2001.
- The Water Resources Protection Act, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 29/2000.
- Regulations governing the quality of drinking water, promulgated by Ministerial Decree No. 31/2023.
- Regulations for reporting incidents regarding water and sanitation networks, promulgated by Ministerial Decree No. 9/2023.
- Regulations to protect the interests of consumers of water supplies, drinking water and sewerage services, promulgated by Decree No. 8/2023.
- Regulations governing drinking water supply tariffs, promulgated by Administrative Decree No. 2/2019.
- Regulations governing the use of well-water purification units, promulgated by Ministerial Decree No. 4/2009.
- Regulations governing wells and Aflaj irrigation systems, promulgated by Ministerial Decree No. 13/1995.

193. The Water Resources Protection Act, promulgated under Royal Decree No. 29/2000 is one of the main pieces of regulatory legislation protecting water sources. It regulates the digging of wells and Aflaj irrigation systems and the use of public reservoirs, seeking to protect them from pollution and depletion via procedures that are intended to prevent any deterioration in water quantity or quality in any of the governorates. The Act to protect drinking water sources from pollution, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 115/2001, serves the goal of reducing pollution in drinking water sources, which include rainwater, surface water and groundwater, whether fresh, saline or semi-saline. Another significant step towards achieving this goal came with the regulations governing the quality of drinking water, which envisage quality testing on water samples against approved norms and assessment of the related risks. It should be noted that 108.6 million cubic metres of wastewater was treated during the course of 2022. In addition, Oman has implemented a value-added agricultural project using triple-treated water to produce crops that enhance agricultural production in salt-affected agricultural lands.

194. In a report entitled “Progress on change in water-use efficiency”, issued in 2021 by the Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and UN-Water, Oman was classified among the countries that had increased water-use efficiency

between 2015 and 2018. In fact, the State embraced a body of projects and initiatives to achieve that goal, most notably to develop drinking water production and bottling plants in Oman, to update the country's water balance, to develop traditional agricultural systems and to enhance pluviculture.

195. The purpose of the Act on the regulation of the electricity sector and its associated water sector is to integrate water resource management. The State is also implementing a national water resources master plan 2001–2020 and developing a national water strategy 2010–2030, and it has rolled out several initiatives for the optimal and sustainable use of natural resources, in order to achieve water and food security and to complement the aforementioned strategies, which are in line with the Oman Vision 2040. This is being done in partnership with water agencies and other stakeholders and is consistent with national strategies for the economy and the service sector. In addition to this, public policies for the water sector are being reviewed, drafted and brought into line with other sectoral policies in areas such as agriculture, the environment, healthcare and food. Future areas of focus in this sector will include a specific national strategy for the water resources sector, opening the sector up to investment and working to achieve the water resources target in the Oman Vision 2040.

196. In 2012, Oman acceded to the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (the Ramsar Convention), which aims to conserve and manage wetlands and protect ecosystems. The Qurum Nature Reserve, with its more than 80 hectares of mangrove forest, was chosen as the first site of international importance, while the 54 hectares of the Al-Ansab Lakes were selected the second site. The latter is a sewage treatment plant connected to a series of ponds where water is reused for irrigation. Oman is also heavily invested in its pluviculture system, which helps to increase rainfall and to build up the groundwater reservoir. The building of dams to create reservoirs has also played a significant role in increasing the amount of groundwater and, by 2022, there were 115 dams across the country. One significant initiative in this regard has been the roll-out of a national strategy to address the issue of saline water and to protect water resources from pollution. The strategy seeks, in the first instance, to assess the extent of salinity and pollution in groundwater, evaluate the economic impact of salinity and identify administrative and technical practices to combat water pollution and salinity across the country.

#### **Access to decent housing**

197. Royal Decree No. 42/2021 regulating the allocation of government lands includes provisions guaranteeing families' right to land. Oman, which has already made notable achievements in the field of housing, has now entered a new phase in the form of the “integrated residential neighbourhoods” project, which serves to support existing housing policies. Those policies consisted in searching for alternatives to provide suitable housing for citizens entitled to residential lands but have now shifted to the more sustainable goal of facilitating home ownership. The project, which is the first of its kind in Oman, is underpinned by a public-private partnership.

198. Oman runs housing programmes that ensure suitable accommodation for all members of society. These include the construction of housing units for persons on low income and the provision of housing subsidies and facilitated loans. The aim is to provide decent living conditions in housing close to the villages in which people live, thus enabling them to pursue their socioeconomic activities and develop their local communities. In cooperation with the charitable and private sectors, State institutions build houses, provide housing subsidies and facilitated loans and undertake maintenance and restoration work for families on social security, persons with disabilities, older persons and persons on limited incomes. Several other initiatives have also been set in train, including one that aims to exempt all citizens with a monthly income of less than RO 350 from their debts under the facilitated loan scheme run by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning. Another venture is a “stability” scheme, which purposes to provide furnishings, household items and electrical appliances for the homes of families on social security or on limited incomes. A total of 180 families in different governorates benefited from this initiative in 2020, at a cost of RO 148,000. By 2022, that number had gone up to 190.

## Article 12

### Right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health

#### Right of all persons to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health

199. The right to enjoy the highest standard of health is underpinned by article 15 of the Basic Law of the State, which stipulates that the State is to provide citizens with healthcare and with services to prevent and treat diseases and epidemics, just as it is to promote the establishment of private hospitals and clinics, and to provide medical insurance, under State oversight. This demonstrates how the right to enjoy the highest standard of health is guaranteed by the highest constitutional legislation in Oman. All State authorities and institutions are beholden to that constitutional legislation which also undergirds all health-related and health insurance-related policies, legislation, decrees and measures.

200. The prioritization of healthcare and the health-related strategic goals under the Oman Vision 2040 have necessitated the involvement of stakeholders from the government and private sectors and from civil society. The system for delivering comprehensive and equitable healthcare across governorates has been expanded, overcoming geographical distances to provide the best healthcare services for citizens and residents of Oman, consistent with international standards.

201. The vision for the future of the healthcare system (“Health Vision 2050”) is “for the people of Oman to live healthy and productive lives by creating an equitable, effective responsive, well-organized healthcare system that is based on the social values of equality and social justice”.

202. According to Royal Decree No. 10/2024 which defines the functions and organizational structure of the Ministry of Health, one function (function 5) of the Ministry is “to administer and run healthcare services of all kinds (preventive, diagnostic, therapeutic, rehabilitative, etc.) for all citizens and their families, and for residents, as set forth in relevant royal decrees, laws and regulations”.

203. In line with the Basic Law of the State and in order to prioritize healthcare and achieve the health-related strategic goals under the Oman Vision 2040, the mission of the Ministry of Health (as set forth in the updated national health policy adopted in 1992) consists in “ensuring a healthy and fulfilling life for all persons in Oman by mobilizing energies, efforts and resources to promote healthcare, and working as a team to achieve that goal”.

204. The national patient referral scheme (MoH/DGSMC/SOP/023/Ver03) covers all levels of the healthcare system (primary healthcare, secondary specialized healthcare and tertiary advanced healthcare) and facilitates access to all the services the system provides, thereby upholding the principle of fairness and the continuity of care.

205. The healthcare system in Oman provides universal coverage for citizens and non-citizens alike. Care is delivered directly in health institutions, principally in those owned and run by the State. The Ministry of Health is the main provider of healthcare and is responsible for drafting and supervising the implementation of health policies and plans. Other organizations that provide healthcare in the country are:

- Medical City Hospital for Military and Security Services
- University Medical City
- Medical Services at the Diwan of the Royal Court
- Private healthcare sector.

206. Since its beginnings in the late 1970s, the private healthcare sector has contributed to the provision of health services in Oman via small general clinics (198 in 1980). As the sector grew in size, a directorate was created to regulate it.

207. As of the end of 2022, the Ministry of Health was administering 192 medical institutions, 21 health complexes and 56 hospitals. In the area of private healthcare, there were 35 hospitals, 214 general clinics, 296 specialized clinics, 327 medical centres and

complexes, 381 dental clinics, 15 medical laboratories, 6 magnetic resonance diagnostic centres and 975 pharmacies.

208. The Ministry of Health runs the national primary healthcare system, which covers the entire population. This is consistent with paragraph 55 of the reporting guidelines concerning a national primary healthcare system. The system focuses on the following elements: health education and support for community activities; the promotion of healthy and balanced nutrition; environmental health; maternal healthcare; child healthcare; immunization against childhood diseases and other infectious complaints; school health; mental health; healthy vision; oral health; prevention, control and treatment of common diseases and injuries; adequate supply and rational use of essential medicines; detection of noncommunicable diseases; community participation through provincial health committees and a “healthy towns and villages” programme; care for older persons; and home care.

209. Oman provides preventive, curative and rehabilitation facilities, goods and services for everyone, including persons with disabilities and older persons, and it facilitates access to hospitals and healthcare facilities for persons with disabilities. All members of society are able to benefit from the healthcare system and the three levels of care (primary, secondary and tertiary) it provides, as healthcare centres and health complexes are located close to population centres in all the provinces and governorates of Oman. There are more than 240 primary healthcare institutions delivering integrated preventive, therapeutic and rehabilitative services, and the buildings in which the institutions are located are designed to accommodate persons with disabilities of both sexes.

210. As part of its role to provide healthcare for persons with disabilities, the Ministry of Health issued Circular 5/2023, which concerns facilitated access to the services the Ministry provides. In particular, the Circular accords priority to persons with disabilities in appointments for medical consultations, in diagnostic tests, in surgical operations and in rehabilitation services. It also envisages reduced waiting times, the allocation of special seats in waiting rooms and the delivery of the required service at an institution near to their place of residence. Lastly, the Circular includes provision for assistance and psychological support when visiting the institution and the allocation of special parking places.

211. Special services are also provided for older persons. In fact, the vision for the future of the healthcare system (“Health Vision 2050”), which is the cornerstone for all interventions and strategies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, seeks to ensure universal and high-quality healthcare coverage for older persons, at a reasonable cost and in line with international standards. Healthcare systems and procedures for older persons are also periodically reviewed and any necessary changes can be made to improve those systems, achieve universal health coverage and facilitate the provision of integrated care for older persons.

212. The national programme for the welfare of older persons began delivering services at the national level in 2011. The programme provides care for older persons in Oman who are able to reach primary healthcare institutions, while home visits by doctors and nurses are available for persons unable to reach the institutions. The aim is to empower families, via a community health programme, to care for their older members, under the slogan “active ageing in the bosom of the family”. The programme includes mechanisms for comprehensive physical, psychological and social assessments; the condition of older persons and their need for assistance is then categorized in order to develop an appropriate solution, either by admitting them to an institution, providing home care or referring them for secondary or tertiary care. Other solutions include home visits to train caregivers in optimal care techniques, the provision of assistive devices and economic support or rehabilitative which entails adapting the home environment of the older persons concerned. One of the most important medical services under the programme is physiotherapy, which is delivered via mobile or fixed physiotherapy units located in all governorates.

213. The Drug Safety Centre works to ensure the quality, safety and security of the pharmaceutical products available in Oman. To this end, it has put in place procedures for registering pharmaceutical companies and for registering and pricing their products. The Centre also oversees drugs once they have been put on the market and receives regular reports wherewith it is able to monitor any adverse effects and take appropriate measures. The Centre

has a technical committee that develops systems and mechanisms for registering pharmaceutical companies and for registering and pricing human medicines, and it is careful to ensure that such products remain affordable for everyone. This is consistent with paragraph 56 (c) and paragraph 57 (f) of the reporting guidelines (concerning art. 12).

214. As regards paragraph 56 (d) of the reporting guidelines (concerning art. 12), which enjoins adequate training of health personnel, including on health and human rights, the Ministry of Health has a coherent strategy for training and qualifying all its medical, paramedical and administrative staff, the aim being to develop the human resources of the health sector and thereby to improve the quality of healthcare services. A number of continuing education programmes have been approved under a national policy for continuing vocational education, published in 2009. The programmes can be altered to accommodate scientific and vocational developments at the local and international levels. In addition to this, national workshops are being held to provide human rights training to health workers, to imbue them with skills to detect abuses and to provide them with mechanisms to deal with such cases. The courses – which are being organized in cooperation with international organizations and with the involvement of other stakeholders – instruct healthcare workers how to apply national guidelines and algorithms when dealing with confirmed or suspected cases of abuse.

### **Maternal and child healthcare**

215. The improvement of maternal and child health is one of the strategic goals of the Oman Vision 2040, and in order to achieve that goal, the Ministry of Health has adopted a number of health-related programmes and services for mothers and children. These include a healthcare programme for women during pregnancy, childbirth and the postnatal period; a birth spacing programme; an expanded immunization programme for children; regular follow-up of child development; the promotion of safe delivery services in hospitals; and the screening of newborns for hearing difficulties and hypothyroidism. In order to facilitate access, these services have been integrated into the primary healthcare package. The services are provided free of charge in State-run healthcare institutions and are covered by health insurance in non-governmental institutions.

216. Indicators show that 99 per cent of women receive healthcare during their pregnancies and that 99 per cent of births take place under medical supervision. The immunization rate for children against infectious disease has also risen to 99 per cent, and diphtheria and polio have been eradicated. This level of healthcare coverage has led to a palpable decrease in maternal and child mortality. For its part, the Ministry of Health is working to reinforce its system for monitoring and studying stillbirths and neonatal deaths, and each case is investigated by specialized committees in order to determine the relevant causes and factors.

217. In order to limit the transmission of infectious diseases that have the potential to cause birth defects (such as syphilis and HIV/AIDS), mothers undergo early testing and detection for those conditions from their first visit. If the presence of an infection is confirmed, treatment is provided to avoid transmission to the foetus. The World Health Organization (WHO) has certified that Oman has eliminated mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS and syphilis.

218. The Ministry of Health has issued Decree 228/2023 in which it specifies that epidemic and infectious diseases that constitute a threat to public health are to be treated free of charge. This includes HIV/AIDS for pregnant women and children up to the age of 18 months. In addition to this, the rotavirus vaccine has been included in the list of child vaccinations, and newborns are tested immediately after birth for congenital hypothyroidism.

219. With a view to improving maternal health, a national system is in place to monitor, investigate and identify the causes of maternal mortality. Recommendations are then issued and their implementation is duly monitored. One reproductive health service that is available in all primary healthcare institutions in all governorates is family planning in which trained personnel provide counselling in line with the national counselling guidelines. Diagnosis and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases are provided at primary healthcare institutions, and cases requiring specialized care are referred to secondary care institutions.

### **Health in schools and universities**

220. Healthcare in schools and universities focuses on encouraging healthy lifestyles among all elements of the community and developing equitable, comprehensive and high-quality health services, thereby promoting the health of students at higher education facilities in all governorates and provinces. This is consistent with articles 44 and 45 of the School Education Act, which guarantee the right of students to appropriate healthcare and to services to promote their mental, physical and social well-being.

221. The school health programme aims to change erroneous ideas, attitudes and practices among students and to provide them with correct and reliable health-related information so that they can then inform their own families and communities. To this end, an integrated health education programme exists for students of different age groups.

### **Girls' health**

222. The aim of this programme is to promote the health of schoolgirls in the sixth grade by introducing them to the changes, requirements and issues associated with adolescence and how to deal with them. It also aims to support healthy lifestyles in terms of nutrition, physical activity and personal hygiene.

### **Peer education programme**

223. The programme, which was launched in 2004 and targets children in the 13–18 age group, aims to provide health-related education about nutrition, physical activity and road safety, to combat the consumption of tobacco, prevent abusive behaviour among young people and preclude sexually transmitted diseases in schools.

### **Counselling for adolescents**

224. This service aims to prevent or minimize the impact of risky behaviours on the part of adolescents due to personal or environmental factors. The adolescent counselling service is offered in schools and primary healthcare institutions and is accompanied by a manual outlining the main characteristics and features of adolescence. The counselling is guided by the needs of the adolescents; the skills, values and attitudes of the counsellor; and the ethics and professionalism of counselling.

### **Mental health services in schools**

225. Mental health services in schools have been strengthened with a view to the early detection of students with psychiatric or mental conditions. This in turn helps to identify action that can be taken by school nursing services to minimize possible risk factors.

### **University healthcare services**

226. Young persons in institutions of higher education are provided with support to render them capable of engaging in work and shouldering responsibilities. A health promotion programme for higher education institutions aims to promote healthy behaviours such as physical activity, sound nutrition and the rejection of tobacco and drugs. The aim is to make university environments safe and healthy and to provide basic health services.

### **Combating and preventing noncommunicable diseases**

227. The treatment of common chronic diseases has been integrated into primary healthcare institutions, which have clinics to deal with diabetes, hypertension and asthma, as well as other chronic diseases such as thyroid disorders and adiposopathy. Medications are provided to treat various chronic conditions.

228. Mental health clinics run by psychiatrists are available at primary healthcare facilities and provide drugs for the treatment of psychiatric conditions.

229. Services for the early detection of noncommunicable diseases and tumours have been available in primary healthcare institutions since 2008.

### Combating and preventing communicable diseases

230. The Ministry of Health provides all its public services without discrimination between women and men or between citizens and migrants. Public health and preventive medicine programmes are in place to monitor the diseases on the national list of communicable and vaccine-preventable diseases. The programmes also serve to monitor and combat vector-borne diseases.

231. The Communicable Diseases Act, which was promulgated under Royal Decree No. 73/92 and subsequently amended under Royal Decree No. 32/2020, includes a list of communicable diseases for which, in order to safeguard public health, treatment is envisaged free of charge. The treatment is delivered irrespective of sex or social standing, and the list is reviewed and updated on an annual basis by decree of the Minister of Health.

232. The Ministry of Health seeks to apply international standards vis-à-vis communicable diseases by:

- Adhering to the Global Antimicrobial Resistance and Use Surveillance System
- Undertaking to implement the core components of the WHO infection prevention and control protocol
- Applying patient safety standards in healthcare institutions
- Implementing the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) policy.

In this connection, the Ministry of Health cooperates with other government bodies – such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the Ministry of the Interior (Department for Municipalities) and the Ministry of Education – and with the private sector in order to prevent and control infections in healthcare institutions and in the wider community.

### Drinking water and sanitation

233. Data shows that the drinking water consumed by the population of Oman in 2020 was 100 per cent safe, as compared to 90 per cent in 2010. This improvement – which is a consequence of the expansion of the networks delivering drinking water from desalination plants – has contributed to a 59 per cent drop in diarrhoeal diseases among children under 5, from 239 cases per 1,000 in 2010 to 98 cases per 1,000 in 2020. There has also been a clear improvement in sanitation, with coverage reaching 99 per cent in 2020 as compared to 82 per cent in 1990. According to the WHO World Health Report 2021, the global average for the use of improved water supplies stood at 71 per cent while global average sanitation coverage was 45 per cent. It follows from this that Oman ranks high among other countries of the world in terms of drinking water safety and sanitation coverage, and this has had a major role in reducing the sicknesses and deaths associated with diarrhoeal diseases.<sup>1</sup>

234. The Ministry of Health undertakes the following activities in relation to environmental and occupational health:

- Working with stakeholders on issues related to climate change
- Investigating environmental pollutants that affect public health and creating the relevant indicators
- Conducting evaluations and environmental impact assessments for development projects, in coordination with other departments
- Developing indicators for exposure to toxic and hazardous substances
- Establishing standards for the treatment of medical waste in health institutions in Oman
- Participating in the formulation of strategies and policies related to workers' health, including rules and mechanisms for assessing disability, conducting medical

<sup>1</sup> Draft of the third national report on human development in Oman, Ministry of the Economy, unpublished, p. 61.

investigations and determining the suitability of workers for jobs that entail occupational health hazards.

- Investigating diseases and injuries associated with exposure to occupational hazards
- Taking preventive measures to promote health in the workplace, particularly for healthcare workers
- Ensuring non-discrimination for workers entering the country, via centres in all Arab Gulf States that serve to guarantee workers health and medical rights
- Engaging with other Arab Gulf States in matters relating to public health, via centres for screening the fitness of incoming workers, thereby ensuring their health-related rights before and during their stay in the country.

235. The Ministry of Health has recognized that the healthcare system must be better prepared to respond to crises, emergencies and epidemics and to adapt to and withstand rapid changes in communicable and noncommunicable diseases. For this reason, the Ministry has undertaken a comprehensive review of the various components of the system, focusing on the service delivery model and universal coverage, the management of health crises, responses to disease outbreaks, the consolidation of alternative sources of financing, medical supply and supply chains, and the use of technology in line with developments in those fields. It has also strengthened partnership and cooperation with health sectors inside and outside Oman, as was evident in its handling of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

## **Article 13**

### **Right to education**

236. Underpinned by the principle that universal education without discrimination is a right, legislation and policies in Oman underscore the right of all persons to free and compulsory education and to equality of opportunity. This is consistent with article 16 (“Cultural principles”) of the Basic Law of the State, which stipulates: “Education is a right for all citizens. Its purpose is to build the Omani character, preserve national identity, inculcate rational thinking, develop talents, encourage innovation, consolidate civilized and spiritual values and anchor the notions of citizenship, tolerance and harmony. Education is compulsory up to the primary level. The State is to encourage the establishment of private schools and institutes and supervise their operation, in accordance with the provisions of law. The State is to work to combat illiteracy.”

237. Article 42 of the School Education Act states that students have equal rights to education and that they and may not be discriminated against on grounds of sex, origin, language, religion, confessional group or social status, or for any other reason. According to article 2 of the Act, the overarching purpose of school education in Oman is to achieve the comprehensive and integrated development of a learner’s character in all its mental, emotional, spiritual and physical aspects. International pedagogical research has confirmed that children who are enrolled in early education for one or two years go on to perform better academically. Indicators in Oman show the successes achieved by the education sector and its focus on quality, thanks to the provision of adequate budgets and financial resources. Indeed, in the academic year 2022/23, government spending on school education amounted to 9.7 per cent of all government spending. Moreover, according to the Global Innovation Index 2023, Oman occupied ninth place in the classification of countries in terms of the amount of government funding per pupil and second place in graduates in science and engineering.

<sup>2</sup> For further information and statistics on healthcare in Oman, please consult the Annual Health Report 2022 (47623227-57f9-d9b7-372b-f16d8af6d91f (moh.gov.om)).

**Table 6 concerning the increase in the number of State-run schools, pupils and teachers**

Year	No. of schools	No. of pupils	No. of teachers
2020/21	1 182	678 359	56 827
2021/22	1 203	707 126	57 113
2022/23	1 241	744 016	58 704
2023/24	1 296	776 549	61 376

238. Article 13 of the Children's Act states that children have the right to knowledge, to use means of innovation and creativity and to participate in recreational, cultural, artistic and academic activities.

239. Under the School Education Act, the Ministry of Education is to guarantee a safe and welcoming school environment and to enable pupils to acquire the knowledge, skills and competencies appropriate to their specific level of schooling. According to data for the academic year 2022/23, class size is 29 pupils. The Ministry works to ensure appropriate free healthcare and free and safe transportation to and from school and home, and it provides the services necessary to promote pupils' mental, physical and social health in addition to vocational counselling and guidance. Article 51 of the Children's Act states: "Children with disabilities are to enjoy all the rights envisaged in the Act, without discrimination on grounds of their disability." Article 52 of the Act reads: "The State is to provide care and habilitation for children with disabilities, in accordance with the Care and Habilitation of Persons with Disabilities Act. The State and the parents or guardian are to seek to enable the child concerned to access all relevant care and habilitation services." According to the latest statistics released by the Ministry of Education for the academic year 2022/23, 2,382 pupils with disabilities of both sexes were receiving educational services, either in inclusive classrooms in State-run schools or in special education schools for disabilities of various kinds. In addition to this, on an annual basis the Ministry of Education sends students with disabilities to study in regular schools abroad. A number of students with disabilities are also sent on scholarships to study in universities outside Oman, with 606 students, 42 per cent of them female, benefiting from that initiative in the academic year 2021/22. Part of the scholarships are awarded to students with specific disabilities (motorial, visual, auditory and mental). Students with disabilities are also admitted to local institutions of higher education.

240. Gender equality in education is an obligation, in line with article 15 of the Basic Law of the State which stipulates: "Justice, equality and equal opportunities between citizens are the bedrock of society and are guaranteed by the State." Article 38 of the Children's Act sets forth the goals that education in Oman strives to achieve, which include "(d) to instil values of equality between individuals and of non-discrimination on grounds of religion, sex, ethnicity, race, social origin or disability, or on any other grounds". According to the latest indicators, parity and equality between the sexes have been achieved in education in Oman, and any minor discrepancies may be attributed to the demographic structure of the country, where there is preponderance of males. The gender parity index in gross enrolment rates in primary education is 0.99 while the parity rate for remaining in primary education is 1.0, and the parity rate for moving from primary to post-primary education is 1.1.

241. The Ministry of Education allows the establishment and operation of private and foreign schools by individuals or organizations, under the regulations for such establishments promulgated by Decree No. 278/2017. The admission of non-Omani students to State-run schools and of Omani students to foreign schools is regulated by article 41 of the School Education Act. International curricula can be used in these schools following review by the Ministry of Education. In the academic year 2022/23, there were 994 private schools and 46 foreign schools in Oman. Moreover, under articles 19 and 20 of the School Education Act, the Ministry can allow the private sector to establish schools and other centres specializing in science, arts, etc. Article 9 of the Higher Education Act, promulgated under Royal Decree No. 27/2023, admits the establishment of private universities and colleges, while article 5 of the Act stipulates that institutions of higher education enjoy legal personality and financial and administrative independence. For its part, article 6 of the Act indicates that institutions

of higher education enjoy freedom of thought, academic research and innovation, in accordance with applicable laws and legislation. Table 7 below shows the increase in the number of private and foreign schools and pupils.

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of schools</i>	<i>No. of pupils</i>
2020/21	708	134 735
2021/22	927	180 597
2022/23	1 040	207 560
2023/24	1 149	211 959

242. Officials responsible for education in Oman seek to strike a balance between quantity and method, with a particular focus on the quality of education. Students' right to receive a high-quality education that enables them to meet national and international standards is enshrined in article 43 of the School Education Act. Statistics for the academic year 2022/23 indicate that the gross enrolment rate in grades 1 to 4 was 100.3 per cent, while the gross enrolment rate in grades 5–10 stood at 101.2 per cent and in grades 11–12 at 94.7 per cent. Thanks to the fact that the Ministry has embraced policies and programmes to support students as they progress through different grades, the percentage of out-of-school children stood at just 1.6 per cent for grades 1–4 and at 3.4 per cent for grades 5–10, in the academic year 2022/23. Table 3 in annex 1 of the present report shows enrolment rates in education for the Sultanate of Oman.

243. In fulfilment of article 24 of the School Education Act, the percentage of children older than their grade level in primary education (grades 1–10) has decreased. This is due to the effectiveness of the policies, programmes and laws in place to ensure that all students enrol in school. In fact, according to the 2022 Yearbook of Educational Statistics published by the Ministry of Education, the percentage of such children in grades 1–4 was 0.003 per cent and in grades 5–10 0.04 per cent, in the academic year 2022/23. Article 29 of the School Education Act also stipulates that post-primary education is to serve to prepare students for lifelong learning and to provide them with knowledge and skills that qualify them to pursue specialized or university education or to join the labour market.

244. Oman supports the view that education for sustainable development is an essential component of lifelong learning. All educational institutions of all levels in the country seek to inculcate skills related to sustainability, climate change, sustainable consumption patterns, citizenship, tolerance, values and human rights. Respect for cultural diversity is also part of school curricula, while an interactive learner-centred school environment serves to create outcomes in which those concepts can be upheld. National laws, policies and documents also seek to promote education for sustainable development and citizenship. These include a document on the philosophy of education in Oman, which serves the main source of reference for all educational policies. The document contains a set of 16 principles underpinning the general objectives of education, such as education for human rights and duties, education for sustainable development, education for peace and understanding, lifelong learning and identity and citizenship. Educational institutions are developing policy documents with a view to incorporating the concepts of sustainable development and citizenship into school curricula. These documents include one outlining general concepts in school curricula, which envisions the integration of topics relating to environmental education, human rights, children's rights and natural disasters.

245. Oman works to combat illiteracy and to ensure that all persons of both sexes are competent in reading, writing and arithmetic. This principle is upheld in article 13 ("Cultural principles") of the Basic Law of the State, which stipulates that the State is to provide public education and to work to combat illiteracy. Thanks to the great efforts being made by the Ministry of Education, the illiteracy rate among persons aged 15 and above fell to 4.8 per cent in 2023 (3.2 per cent among males and 6.5 per cent among females). In the same year, the illiteracy rate among persons aged between 15 and 44 stood at 0.58 per cent (0.54 per cent among males and 0.62 per cent among females). The figures come from the National Centre for Statistics and Information. The Ministry of Education is in the process of finalizing the core document for its lifelong learning strategy.

246. Oman believes in investing in children, who constitute the bedrock of society. The State therefore attaches great importance to early childhood development in its various social, health, educational and cultural ramifications. National efforts in this regard are regulated by the Children's Act, the social work strategy 2016–2025 and the national strategy for childhood 2016–2025. The State encourages the establishment of kindergartens, which are educational social institutions that care for children aged between 3 months and 3.5 years. Their operation is governed by the implementing regulations of the Children's Act, which were promulgated under Ministerial Decree No. 125/2019 and which aim to provide a safe and suitable educational environment in which children can learn and play. Kindergartens seek to provide children with a sound mental and physical upbringing and to help them acquire healthy social habits that are consistent with the goals and values of society while overseeing their natural physical growth and development, instilling and consolidating behavioural values and supporting basic needs.

247. Kindergartens – which are supervised by the Ministry of Social Development – play a major role in the development, health and welfare of children. As of 2022, there were 332 kindergartens attended by 7,537 children; this represents an increase of 61.2 per cent on 2015, when there were 206 kindergartens. The provision of preschool education is in the hands of the private sector, under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Education. The Ministry also provides "kindergarten learning corners" in all governorates and runs pre-primary classes in remote areas where there are no private schools nearby. In the academic year 2022/23, the gross enrolment rate in preschool education reached 57 per cent, and the rate of participation in organized education (one year before enrolment in primary education) reached 81.5 per cent. The Ministry of Education is currently working to expand the provision of early education, in which regard it has issued Ministerial Decree No. 20/2023 for the formation of a committee and subcommittees and the development of a staged expansion plan, in pursuance of goal 93 of the tenth five-year plan 2021–2025.

248. Article 14 of the Children's Act stipulates that children have the right to preventive and curative healthcare, and the State, for its part, guarantees children the highest attainable level of healthcare, free of charge. The various authorities that work with children in Oman combine their efforts vis-à-vis nutrition and school health, notably thanks to cooperation between the Department for Health in Schools and Universities, which is part of the Ministry of Health, and the Department for Guidance and Awareness at the Vocational Guidance and Student Counselling Centre, which is part of the Ministry of Education. These two departments work together to provide a healthy environment and correct nutrition for children in schools. Health records show that the incidence of protein-energy malnutrition was 1.2 per 1,000 children under the age of 5 in 201 while, according to the 2022 Annual Health Report, no malnutrition-related deaths have been recorded over the last five years.

249. Article 16 of the Basic Law stipulates: "The State is to guarantee the independence of universities, facilitate admission to higher education equally for all persons on a basis of competency and merit, encourage the establishment of private and charity-run universities and act to ensure that university education remains consistent with international quality standards." The Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation exercises general oversight of the system of higher and vocational education, formulates the relevant intersectoral policies, supports diversity in various fields of knowledge and develops study programmes in line with the needs of sustainable development and scientific progress. Article 3 of the Higher Education Act encourages and supports academic research, creativity and innovation with a view to building a knowledge economy, supporting diversity in various areas of knowledge, developing study programmes in line with the needs of sustainable development and scientific progress in various fields and providing an educational, training and research environment that supports creativity, innovation, knowledge production and entrepreneurship. According to statistics for the academic year 2022/23, there are 71 institutions of higher education in Oman (36 State-run and 35 private), geographically distributed across various governorates and provinces.

250. The State delivers higher education to students enrolled in State-run institutions. Educational policies in Oman aim to ensure that all students of both sexes who meet the admission requirements (a general school diploma or its equivalent) are given equal opportunities to compete for enrolment in higher education. The authorities are working to

help children from families on social security to build their capabilities and develop self-reliance. During the academic year 2023/24, 675 such children who did not meet the conditions for admission to State-run institutions of higher education were granted scholarships to study at private universities and colleges. According to the statistics for the academic year 2021/22, the gross enrolment rate in higher education reached 47.6 per cent.

251. As part of efforts to promote cultural exchange, strengthen regional and international cooperation and partnership and expand knowledge in the field of higher education, a number of students are sent to study abroad. At the same time, every year Oman attracts students from other countries who come to study at the country's institutions of higher education. In the academic year 2021/22, there were 3,454 international students of both sexes.

252. Article 24 of the Higher Education Act authorizes institutions of higher education to admit international students. In order to encourage higher education and the opening of new institutions to accommodate students, article 31 of the Act envisages tax exemptions for non-governmental institutions of higher education for a period of five years from the date they begin operating. The exemption is renewable for a further five years.

253. Vocational and technical training is delivered via an integrated system calibrated to produce high-quality results that respond to the needs of the economy. The Ministry of Education has launched a project for the gradual introduction of vocational and technical training as part of the first phase of post-primary education in a number of schools, in accordance with international best practice. Study plans thus accommodate the development of curricula tailored to the needs of institutions of higher education institutions as well as those of the labour market, and this grants students the flexibility to choose a curriculum that corresponds to their own inclinations and desires. This process is overseen by the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation and the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, at the diploma and bachelor's degree levels. Seven vocational colleges and 8 branches of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences offer 57 programmes in engineering, business studies, health and beauty, agricultural technologies, maritime and fishing technologies, marine engineering, accounting, customer service, logistics, information technology, applied sciences, pharmacy, fashion design and photography. Vocational and technical education in Oman can lead to various forms of qualification such as training-course certificates testifying to limited, skilled or professional levels of vocational competency; a vocational diploma following the foundation programme; an advanced (three-year) diploma; or a bachelor's degree.

254. All policy frameworks in Oman, especially the national programme for artificial intelligence and advanced technologies, emphasize the importance of building competencies and skills for a changing work environment. Digital programmes and projects have been rolled out that aim to develop the skills necessary to work with advanced information technology. The authorities are working to build a sound Internet infrastructure and, in fact, the latest statistics for the academic year 2022/23 indicate that about 97 per cent of schools in Oman have computers and Internet access for educational purposes.

255. Teaching staff are an essential part of the development and improvement of education. In recognition of the great role teachers play in improving learning outcomes, the authorities are working to build their capacities, enhance their professional qualifications and provide them with the support they require. In particular, the focus is on imbuing teachers with technological skills, media literacy, critical interpersonal capacities and knowledge of modern pedagogical methods, in order to enhance their positive impact and the management of their work. In parallel with these efforts, the Ministry of Education has recruited more than 5,600 teachers of both sexes for the academic year 2023/24, and the average number of students per qualified teacher is now 13. Moreover, according to international standards, 100 per cent of teachers in Oman are fully qualified. During 2023, the Specialized Teacher Training Institute ran 27 centralized programmes for 1,266 trainees, and 109 decentralized programmes for 5,351 trainees. The Ministry of Education supports teachers in several ways, including via an official holiday for Omani teachers which falls on February 24, the launch of an Omani teacher educational excellence award and a system of professional licenses and ranks.

256. Oman is pledged to providing high-quality education for all children, including those with disabilities, in accordance with the Basic Law of the State, ratified international treaties and covenants and the national priorities enshrined in the Oman Vision 2040, which include provision for comprehensive education and for empowering and integrating persons with disabilities into society. The Ministry of Education issued Ministerial Decree No. 72/2023 for the formation of a steering committee to oversee the development and structuring of school education with a view to providing comprehensive education for all students, with their different needs and abilities, and to meeting the needs of students with different kinds of disability. The Ministry of Education works to deliver high-quality services to students enrolled in the three special education schools for persons with hearing, intellectual and visual disabilities. They are, respectively, the Amal School for the Deaf, the Fikriya School and the Omar ibn al-Khattab Institute for the Blind. Those institutions apply special study plans and programmes to provide vocational training and qualifications to their charges, with the aim of integrating them into society and preparing them for life. They also provide services for the inclusion of such children in primary education at State-run schools in the governorates.

257. The Ministry of Education runs a programme for children with learning difficulties in both State-run and private schools. The programme envisages special classrooms equipped to provide a suitable environment to meet the needs of such children and to give them equal educational opportunities, taking due account of their individual capacities and helping them overcome some of the academic challenges they have to face.

258. Educators receive training to qualify them to teach and interact with students with disabilities. Training is also provided to supervisors, chief supervisors and administrators of special education schools with a view to improving their capacities and their understanding of supervisory functions, with a focus on modern practices and methods for effective educational supervision. Training programmes on the use of e-learning for special education students have been run for teachers and specialists, including speech and language therapists.

259. All this exists within an integrated governance framework, which ensures flexibility, effectiveness, continued development and ongoing evaluation of the educational system, in line with global standards. In this connection, Royal Decree No. 9/2021 includes provision for the establishment of the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education, an independent national institution which guides and supports education in Oman, helping it to achieve national priorities and goals while also continuing to meet international benchmarks. In this connection, the Authority has created a national quality assurance system to ensure that school education and higher education in Oman continue to meet international standards. Using its own standards and procedures, the Authority also encourages individual academic institutions to create their own internal quality control systems, and it undertakes assessments of both State-run and private schools. It also accredits State-run and private institutions and programmes of higher education and assesses the quality of foundational courses, and it has drafted a comprehensive national framework for qualifications, which includes Omani qualifications and validations for foreign and international qualifications. The Authority publishes the results of its quality assurance and accreditation activities as well as the results of its validation of qualifications within the national framework.

## **Article 14**

### **Compulsory primary education, free of charge**

260. Guarantees of compulsory and free education in State-run schools is not limited to elementary education (primary schooling from grades 1–4) but also extends to grades 5–10. This principle is upheld in article 36 of the Children's Act, which states: "Children have the right to free education in State-run schools until completion of the post-primary stage. Schooling is compulsory until completion of the primary stage. Parents or guardians are responsible for enrolling children in school, ensuring their regular attendance and preventing them from abandoning their education." According to article 38 of the Act, the purpose of education is to:

- Develop children's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest extent, while ensuring that education programmes uphold children's dignity, enhance their sense of personal worth and prepare them for participation and responsibility
- Inculcate respect for public rights and freedoms among children
- Inculcate in children respect for their parents, their cultural identity, their language and their religious and national values
- Raise children to have a sense of belonging and loyalty to their homeland, to brotherhood and tolerance among humankind and to respect for others
- Instil values of equality between individuals and of non-discrimination on grounds of religion, sex, ethnicity, race, social origin or disability, or on any other grounds
- Inculcate respect for and a desire to protect the natural environment
- Prepare children to live responsibly in a cohesive civil society which balances the enjoyment of rights with the fulfilment of duties.

261. Article 14 of the School Education Act stipulates that education in State-run schools is to be free of charge, while article 24 states that primary education from grades 1 to 10 is compulsory for all children. Article 2 of the Act makes it clear that the overarching purpose of school education in Oman is to achieve the comprehensive and integrated development of a learner's character in all its mental, emotional, spiritual and physical aspects. For its part, article 3 places the obligation for achieving this purpose on the Ministry of Education via the application of an educational system divided into stages that correspond to the stages of child development. The educational system seeks to raise the quality of education and to consolidate infrastructure with a view to producing results that correspond to the Oman Vision 2040. This includes the provision of free school transportation, textbooks and curricula for all students in State-run schools.

## **Article 15**

### **Right to participate in cultural life and to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress**

262. The State safeguards freedom of intellectual creativity, provides for the welfare of creatives, encourages the advancement of arts and literature and determinedly protects and preserves its own tangible and intangible national heritage. The relevant provisions are enshrined in article 16 ("Cultural principles") of the Basic Law of the State.

263. In the light of the fact that cultural development is a key component of comprehensive development, the Oman Vision 2040 prioritizes culture as part of its focus on citizenship, identity and heritage. This is because progress towards the future and engaging with innovation while also preserving the diversity and tolerance of cultural landmarks constitute a way for the Vision to open up to the world while maintaining firm roots and a clear understanding of Omani identity.

#### **Cultural institutions in Oman**

264. Many public and private institutions, civil and charitable, have made and continue to make direct contributions to cultural development, because cultural activity lies at the heart of their functions or constitutes one dimension of their operations. The division of cultural heritage into two main categories (tangible and intangible), in line with the Thematic Indicators for Culture in the 2030 Agenda adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2013, is reflected in the cultural institutions of Oman, which include governmental, private, civil and charitable institutions that concern themselves with policies, programmes and activities related to heritage, archaeology, culture, arts, literature, media, tourism, recreation, and other cultural activities.

265. The Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth was established in 1976 under Royal Decree No. 12/76 and later restructured under Royal Decree No. 87/2020. The purpose of the amendment was to embody the cultural principles enshrined in the Basic Law of the State and to implement the Oman Vision 2040 by ensuring that the services the Ministry offers are

available to all beneficiaries, whether citizens or residents and whether located in cities or villages. The Ministry works through its departments at the governorate level to organize cultural, sporting and youth activities that contribute to community engagement and open the way for young persons to express themselves culturally. Such activities are subsidized by the Ministry, and participants are not required to pay.

266. Sports complexes across Oman are accessible at a nominal cost, which is very low and which admits numerous exemptions for children, persons with disabilities, older persons and women. Furthermore, the Ministry supports cultural initiatives in the form of non-profit activities that deliver cultural services of various kinds to the community. Cultural initiatives are governed by regulations issued under Ministerial Decree No. 212/2016. Support was provided to 42 such initiatives across all governorates of Oman between 2017 and 2024. In addition to this, the Ministry oversees 62 libraries and 8 cultural centres in all governorates and provinces of the country, which are regulated under Ministerial Decree No. 261/2023.

267. *Cultural strategy 2021–2040*: The Ministry has developed a strategy to determine the future direction of the cultural sector and bring it into line with the Oman Vision 2040. The strategy envisages a system of governance which includes periodic five-yearly reviews to systematically measure the extent to which goals have been achieved, according to performance indicators that reflect national, regional and international standards. At the national level, the cultural strategy is based on the Oman Vision 2040, at the regional level on the GCC cultural strategy 2020–2030 and at the international level on the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

268. The cultural strategy covers the following 11 areas: Identity and intangible cultural heritage; manuscripts; cultural festivals and exhibitions; libraries, cultural centres and clubs; translation and publishing; visual arts; cultural communication; cultural initiatives; literature; performing arts; and cultural events, competitions and awards.

### **Specialized institutions under the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth**

269. *Oman Society for the Arts*: Membership is open to all interested persons aged 16 and above, both Omanis and residents. The Society organizes lectures, seminars and art exhibitions for members and artists, and it takes part in conferences, seminars, training courses and art exhibitions locally and internationally. The Society helps to nurture and promote Omani art, to develop artistic awareness and visual culture in the community at large and to highlight the moral value of artists as expressed in their works while also protecting their rights, supporting their artistic production and seeking to overcome the difficulties they might face.

270. *Cultural Club*: This is an independent organization that aims to strengthen cultural and social ties between intellectuals and creatives in various fields of culture and the arts. It also seeks to disseminate cultural awareness by holding seminars and lectures at its headquarters, in the presence of members and the public at large. In addition, the Club organizes art exhibitions and cultural evenings at which it presents the literary and intellectual works by Club members and others. Lastly, the Club also invites Arab and non-Arab creatives and intellectuals to hold exhibitions or to participate in cultural evenings and lectures (paras. 67, 71 and 73 of the reporting guidelines).

271. *Women's Club for Sports and Cultural Creativity*: The Ministry established the Women's Club for Sports and Cultural Creativity in 2021 with the aim of promoting the role of women in sports and culture in line with their effective requirements, providing a safe and supportive environment for them to develop their skills and abilities in those areas, giving them an opportunity to practice cultural and sporting activities and organizing competitions, tournaments and events (para. 67 of the reporting guidelines).

272. *Amal Club for Persons with Hearing Disabilities*: Since its establishment in 2011, the Club has been one of the country's most important institutions supporting persons with auditory disabilities. It serves as a platform to promote cultural, sporting and youth activities for persons in that category and it represents Oman in the relevant cultural, sporting and youth forums. The Club runs vocational and cultural workshops for persons with disabilities, as well as cultural, sporting and recreational events and competitions. Such gatherings represent an opportunity for different groups of persons with disabilities to meet and discuss the matters

that affect them, and to come up with recommendations and initiatives that can then be applied in the wider community, helping to improve the environment and develop services for persons with disabilities. Such activities take place through cooperation between government bodies and the private sector.

273. *Oman Cultural Complex*: The Cultural Complex is a new departure, an Omani cultural, academic and intellectual achievement that will contribute to the advancement of culture, literature, theatre and research; to the promotion of cultural activities, events and programmes; and to the consolidation of cultural activity in different spheres. The Complex – which includes the National Theatre, the National Library and the National Records and Archives Authority – has been designed to accommodate, on the one hand, modern technology which is moving away from paper-based knowledge and, on the other hand, creativity. It embraces many aspects of humanistic and empirical knowledge and creativity. The hope is that the Complex will serve as a platform for young people to showcase their creativity in all fields of knowledge.

### **Cultural institutions affiliated with other government agencies**

#### *Sultan Qaboos Centre for Culture and Science*

274. The Centre helps to enrich the cultural, literary and artistic panorama of Oman. It has a number of objectives, most notably that of making Omani culture more widely known, disseminating national cultural and academic products, drawing on and benefiting from other cultures, helping to develop and consolidate Omani values, encouraging dialogue with other religions and cultures, consolidating shared principles and values and disseminating the country's heritage of civilization and culture at the regional and international levels.

275. Among its other functions, the Centre undertakes academic research and studies, organizes cultural and academic conferences and seminars, and encourages the production of papers on cultural and scientific subjects which it then publishes for distribution to regional and international libraries. The Centre serves as a source of cultural and academic information, and it translates the products of Omani thought into other languages and publishes them. It also keeps abreast of other important cultural works, which it translates into Arabic. In addition to this, the Centre supervises, runs and maintains certain historic mosques and oversees the operation of institutes of sharia law and their attendant libraries. Lastly, the Centre administers its own endowments, which it seeks to protect and develop, and it has established cultural and academic collaboration with similar institutions abroad, in order to promote activities related to cultural rights, the arts and literature.

276. The “Sultan Qaboos Institute for Teaching Arabic to Non-Arabic Speakers” works to achieve the goals for which it was created, serving as an effective instrument for communication between Oman and non-Arabic-speaking peoples and strengthening ties between different cultures. In 2022, 88 students of both sexes from different countries of the world were admitted to the Institute to follow specially prepared study programmes. The Sultan Qaboos Centre for Culture and Science, for its part, runs competitions and awards, details of which are given below.

#### *Sultan Qaboos Prize for Culture, Arts and Literature*

277. The late Sultan Qaboos bin Said bin Taimur was greatly interested in advancing intellectual knowledge and in underscoring the important cultural and historical role played by the Sultanate of Oman. He provided support for many distinguished intellectuals, artists and writers and, on 23 Rabi' I A.H. 1432 (27 February A.D. 2011), emanated Royal Decree No. 18/2011 establishing the Sultan Qaboos Prize for Culture, Arts and Literature.

278. The Sultan Qaboos Prize for Culture, Arts and Literature – one of the most important awards in the Arab world – celebrates Omani and Arab intellectuals, artists and writers and recognizes their contributions to advancing civilization, renewing thought and elevating human conscience. Prizes cover the following areas:

- Cultural works and writings in general fields of human and knowledge, such as language, history, heritage, philosophy, translation, ideas, etc.

- Artistic productions in various internationally recognized forms, such as music, plastic arts, sculpture, photography, etc.
- Literary genres of various kinds, such as poetry, novels, short stories, criticism, playwriting, etc.

*Sultan Qaboos Holy Qur'an Competition*

279. The competition was established by supreme directive of Sultan Qaboos bin Said and was first held in A.H. 1413 AH (A.D. 1991) when it had just three levels. By the time the Competition had reached its twenty-ninth edition in A.D. 2019 it had seven levels, the four additional parts being intended to accommodate a broader range of reciters of the Holy Qur'an.

*"Read" Competition for Children*

280. The "Read" Competition for Children is an annual event intended to reflect the importance of reading as a way of stimulating intellectual activity across the generations. The Competition seeks to enrich young persons' use of their time, to encourage and accustom them to frequent libraries, to sow and nurture a love of reading and to consolidate the principles and values of good citizenship and patriotism. The Competition has expanded geographically and can now be pursued at 12 centres located across all governorates.

*Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre – Washington, United States of America*

281. The Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre was established in 2005 to spread Omani culture in the heart of Washington and to connect with other cultural and educational communities and centres across the United States. Its purpose is to promote knowledge and awareness of the history and civilization the two countries share and to build bridges between their peoples. To this end, the Centre organizes outreach programmes, scholarships, lectures, educational resources and cultural partnerships. It also runs other programmes, activities and events throughout the year, both in Oman and in the United States.

*National Records and Archives Authority*

282. The Government of Oman is greatly concerned to preserve the national memory and heritage enshrined in documentary records, archives and written historical material. It has therefore enacted laws to regulate all mechanisms and efforts in this regard. Under Royal Decree No. 60/2007, the Government established a body – answerable to the Council of Ministers and called the National Records and Archives Authority – which is responsible for managing and protecting all national documentary records and archives. In addition, the Authority provides other bodies with technical advice on how to collect, manage, catalogue and preserve current and intermediate public records. It also collects and preserves documents related to the State abroad and makes them available for consultation by interested parties.

283. The Authority also collects historical State documents that are of public interest, from citizens and from residents, and makes use of archival material to produce reference books in various areas of scientific, intellectual and artistic research. In addition to this, the Authority organizes seminars and conferences at the local and international levels to promote communication and the interchange of knowledge between countries and peoples.

284. The Authority uses international standards such as ISAD(G) and ISAAR(CPF) to classify its archival material, and this helps to promote the effective administration of documents and records. The Authority has organized 26 conferences and seminars and 117 exhibitions of archival material, both inside and outside Oman, and it continues its efforts to raise awareness and to interact with academic and professional communities to draw attention to the importance of Omani history and national heritage. In that regard, the Authority has published 46 historical books and reference works.

*Royal Opera House*

285. The Opera House, one of the most outstanding cultural features of Oman, was established under Royal Decree No. 105/2010. It is a centre of excellence and of global cultural exchange and presents a variety of high-quality artistic and cultural programmes. The Opera House, in fact, organizes shows in partnership with leading global talents, hosts prominent international artists and seeks to promote culture at the regional and international levels. It also serves as a platform where Omani citizens can engage with the ancient cultures of others and as a centre of culture for citizens and residents of Oman.

286. The State acts to ensure that all persons are able to attend concerts, theatres, cinemas, sporting events and other cultural activities at prices that are affordable for all members of society. It also runs free events on certain occasions and provides discounts for children and persons with disabilities, and it encourages attendance at many different cultural activities and programmes, including via the use of modern information technologies such as the Internet and social media platforms. In addition to this, schools and vocational education facilities have incorporated culture and the arts into their own curricula and teaching activities. Table 4 in annex 1 of the present report shows the cultural institutions that operate in the Sultanate of Oman.

**Protecting copyright and intellectual property**

287. The State's obligation to protect intellectual property of all kinds in all fields, in accordance with the law, is enshrined in article 38 in chapter III ("Public rights and duties") of the Basic Law of the State. In view of the fact that copyright is an essential part of intellectual property, the first Copyright Act in Oman was issued in 1996 under Royal Decree No. 47/96. This was then updated in 2008 with the issuance of the Copyright and Related Rights Act, promulgated under Royal Decree No. 65/2008, which demonstrates the State's continuing determination to protect copyright. The latest Act, which is consistent with treaties of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), covers innovative literary, artistic and scientific works, regardless of their value, type, method of expression or purpose.

288. Under the Act, authors have a body of rights, including financial rights which are the rights that devolve upon authors for the works they produce and which entail the preservation of the monetary returns resulting from their choice to exploit that work in any way they see fit. At the same time, moral rights guarantee authors' right to have their work, in any form, attributed to them. The Copyright and Related Rights Act envisages penalties and sanctions for any infringements of intellectual property.

289. The Department for Intellectual Property and Patents at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment oversees copyrights and the registration and protection of patents. Furthermore, the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth has established an "Innovation vision" award to honour innovators and creators of intellectual property in Oman.

290. Oman is a member of the Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore and has acceded to the following WIPO copyright treaties and conventions. The Convention establishing the World Intellectual Property Organization, to which Oman acceded on 19 November 1996 and which entered into force on 19 February 1997; the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, to which Oman acceded on 14 April 1999 and which entered into force on 14 July 1999; the WIPO Copyright Treaty, to which Oman acceded on 20 June 2005 and which entered into force on 20 September 2005; the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty, to which Oman acceded on 20 June 2005 and which entered into force on 20 September 2005; and the Convention relating to the Distribution of Programme-Carrying Signals Transmitted by Satellite (the Brussels Convention, to which Oman acceded on 18 December 2007 and which entered into force on 18 March 2008).

291. Oman is greatly concerned to uphold freedom to conduct academic research and allocates considerable resources to the funding of research in universities. In this regard, the State is inspired by its belief in the importance of research in the progress of nations and the promotion of development as well as its pivotal role in keeping pace with rapid global developments in various fields. A number of programmes are in place to support and fund academic research and innovation at the national level, with governmental support being

provided by the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation in coordination and cooperation with the office administering the Oman Vision 2040.

292. In coordination with the relevant authorities, Oman has developed a national plan to identify the priorities for academic research in the light of the needs of socioeconomic development projects. The plan has been made public with a view to incentivizing research, and programmes have been developed to put the plan into effect and monitor it. Support is provided for individual or institutional innovations and research projects that are consistent with the priorities identified in the national plan. Sultan Qaboos University, which is one of the most important universities in Oman, has nine research centres which specialize in seismic monitoring, petroleum research, remote sensing and geographic information systems, Omani studies, marine biotechnology, hydrological studies and humanities. This is in addition to other research departments administered by the State-run University of Technology and Applied Sciences and by 14 private educational institutions.

293. The media in Oman has been an area of particular concern to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, who issued Royal Decree No. 58/2024 promulgating the Media Act. The Act is intended to reflect the goals of the Oman Vision 2040 as well as changes and developments in the media landscape that have been occasioned by modern electronic technology. It also aims to reinforce the media by upholding objectivity, neutrality, credibility and freedom of opinion and expression, in accordance with the Basic Law of the State. The Act, furthermore, aims to promote values of citizenship and belonging and to enable the media and media professionals to play a constructive and pivotal role in Oman. The Act thus safeguards the rights of media workers, regulates the media profession and establishes controls on media work and the production and publication of literary works. In this way, it helps to encourage the media in Oman to expand its horizons, and it opens the way to a new phase where the media can more easily fulfil its national and cultural mission, in accordance with the aspirations and direction of travel of Oman in the era of its renaissance.

### **Sultan Qaboos academic chairs**

294. The Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Sultan Qaboos University oversee these chairs and fellowships, which have been established at prestigious universities across the globe in various academic fields including politics, religion, culture, economy culture and the arts. The functions of these academic chairs vary from instance to instance but include, most notably, research, publications, conferences, seminars, lectures, and academic forums. The chairs and university fellowships are listed below in chronological order:

- Sultan of Oman Chair in Arabic and Islamic Literature at Georgetown University, United States (1980)
- Sultan of Sultan Qaboos bin Said Chair in Arabic Language at Georgetown University, United States (1993)
- His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Chair in Desert Farming at the Arabian Gulf University, Bahrain (1994)
- Sultan of Oman Chair in Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Melbourne, Australia (2003)
- Sultan of Oman Chair in International Relations at Harvard University, United States (1999)
- Sultan Qaboos bin Said International Fellowship at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, United Kingdom (2004)
- Sultan Qaboos Chair of Information Technology at the Lahore University of Engineering and Technology, Pakistan (2004)
- Sultan Qaboos Chair of Information Technology at the NED University of Engineering and Technology in Karachi, Pakistan (2005)
- His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Chair of Modern Arabic Studies at the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom (2005)

- Sultan Qaboos Chair in Quantitative Water Management at Utrecht University, Kingdom of the Netherlands (2005)
- Sultan Qaboos Chair for Arabic Language Studies at Peking University, China (2007)
- Sultan of Oman Chair of Oriental Studies at Leiden University, Kingdom of the Netherlands (2008)
- Sultan Qaboos Chair of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Tokyo, Japan (2010)
- Sultan Qaboos Professor in Abrahamic Faiths and Shared Values at the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom (2011)
- Sultan Qaboos Professor of Middle Eastern Studies at the College of William and Mary, United States (2011)
- Sultan Qaboos Mathematics Fellowship at Corpus Christi College, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom (2014).

#### **Full participation in cultural life for persons with disabilities and older persons**

295. Oman ranked second in the Arab world, third regionally (Middle East and North Africa) and sixteenth globally in the 2020 Digital Accessibility Rights Evaluation Index issued by the Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communication Technologies. The Index is a monitoring mechanism that provides global metrics for parties concerned with empowering persons with disabilities, to measure progress made in that regard and to identify opportunities for improving digital accessibility for persons with disabilities.

296. The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has developed a national digital accessibility policy which aims to facilitate access to digital information and services for persons with disabilities and older persons and “to ensure that they are able to enjoy fair and equal opportunities to use digital hardware, to access the services and information available on online platforms and to remove any barriers in that regard”.

297. The policy stipulates that digital services on websites and mobile applications of State administrative units and of public and private companies are to be adapted and improved with digital accessibility features. In addition, accessibility is to be a required part of all information technology procurement, in line with international digital accessibility standards. At the same time, functionaries with disabilities are to be provided with assistive information technology systems to enable them to perform their duties, while the authorities responsible for overseeing private sector organizations are to require those organizations to modify and upgrade their existing websites and platforms to bring them into line with international digital accessibility norms.

298. The digital accessibility policy aims to ensure that all members of society in Oman, especially persons with disabilities and older persons, are able to use digital hardware, to access the services and information available on online platforms and to enjoy the opportunities and prospects that technology brings. In this way, the policy ensures that all groups in society contribute to the objectives of the national programme for the digital economy and the Oman Vision 2040. It also serves to improve the quality of services provided to persons with disabilities and older persons and to fulfil the country’s international and regional commitments regarding access to governmental websites.

#### **International communication and cooperation in science and culture**

299. The obligation of the State to protect, preserve and maintain its own tangible and intangible national heritage, and to recover heritage that has been seized, is set forth in article 6 of the Basic Law of the State. Any attacks against or trade in such heritage is a crime under the law. Oman contributes to the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund, which was created under the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and it provides annual support for the International Fund for Cultural Diversity, envisaged under the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

300. Exhibitions abroad can be an effective way to convey a positive image of Islam and to draw attention to the coexistence and religious tolerance that exist in Oman. For that reason, in 2010, the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs launched an international “Message of Islam” initiative, which has so far visited more than 120 cities in 37 countries across the globe. The exhibition – which is entitled “Tolerance, Understanding and Coexistence: The Message of Islam in Oman” and has been gaining growing international acceptance – seeks to disseminate those values among people around the world. It is being organized in coordination with a number of international organizations, notably UNESCO, and with religious groups concerned to disseminate values of moderation, peace and coexistence among peoples, cultures and religions.

301. The Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth strives to preserve the cultural heritage of Oman, and UNESCO has recognized the importance of certain historical monuments and figures, including Jabrin Castle and the historian Hamid bin Mohammed bin Raziq. In addition, six other pioneering figures from Oman have made their way into UNESCO lists of important historical events and globally influential personalities:

- Linguist Al-Khalil bin Ahmad al-Farahidi (2005)
- Physician Rashid bin Omaira al-Rustaqi (2013)
- Sheikh Nur al-Din Abdullah bin Humaid al-Salmi (2015)
- Physician Abu Mohammed Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Azdi, also known as Ibn al-Dhahabi (2015)
- Poet Nasser bin Salem al-Rawahi (Abu Muslim al-Bahlani) (2019)
- Navigator Ahmad bin Majid (2021).

302. Five archaeological sites in Oman and five important Aflaj irrigation systems have also been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. In addition to this, Oman has been able to include eight items in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and, in 2017, the manuscript *Ma'dan al-Asrar fi 'Ilm al-Bahar* (“Treasury of Maritime Secrets”) by Omani sailor Nasser Ali Nasser al-Khadhouri (died 1968) was included in the Memory of the World Register.

### **Culture in the Oman Vision 2040**

303. The Oman Vision 2040 constitutes an ambitious and comprehensive road map for progress and development in all aspects of life for people living in Oman. It seeks to foster knowledge and understanding between different cultures thanks to modern and diverse cultural facilities such as theatres, museums and cultural centres.

304. By means of the Vision 2040, Oman aims to be one of the most advanced countries in terms of culture, a lodestar for creatives, athletes and talented young persons, a driver of positive change and sustainable development and a promoter of cultural, sporting and youth identity. Table 5 in annex 1 of the present report shows the cultural institutions in Oman in the period 2020–2022.

### **Challenges**

305. Since Oman first acceded to human rights treaties and conventions, national committees and teams have gained long experience in monitoring the implementation of those instruments and in drafting the relative initial and periodic reports. These include the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Nonetheless, the drafting of reports and questionnaires on the subjects raised by treaty bodies, as well as by non-treaty bodies (special procedures), has been a persistent challenge. This is because the subjects in question intersect the functions of several ministries and agencies, and this in turn means that the drafting process requires coordination and partnership. It may be that the creation of a single unified body is necessary to overcome this challenge, and the

Government is currently working in that direction in cooperation with civil society and other stakeholders.

306. Despite the fact that law and legislation grant women the right to stand as candidates for the Shura Council, without any discriminatory conditions or gender-based restrictions, the low participation rate of women on the Council remains a persistent challenge. This has nothing to do with the legal framework but, rather, with societal attitudes. It should be noted, nonetheless, that women were effectively engaged in elections for the tenth term (2023–2027) of the Council, with rates exceeding 40 per cent. At the same time, women voters who actually cast their vote amounted to 65.48 per cent of the total electorate, while registered female voters amounted to 48.14 per cent of total electorate. In addition to this, women headed three electoral administration subcommittees out of four such subcommittees under the main committee for the tenth term of the Council. As a way of ensuring female engagement in political activity, under Royal Decree No. 75/2023, 18 women were appointed as members of the State Council for its eighth term (2023–2027). Women thus make up 21 per cent of the members of that Council.

## Conclusion

307. Oman continues to pursue development under well-planned strategies, foremost among them the Oman Vision 2040 and the Government's five-year and annual development programmes and policies. By following such strategies and plans, Oman has managed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and is working to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. In this context, it submitted its first voluntary report in 2019 and is currently preparing to discuss its second voluntary report (2024).

308. Oman has made great strides in its quest to achieve comprehensive and sustainable rebirth, at the start of the third decade of the third millennium. This began with the adoption of the Basic Law of the State (Royal Decree No. 6/2021), which guarantees all human rights including economic, social and cultural rights. Other laws and pieces of legislation have been updated to bring them into line with the international and regional human rights instruments to which Oman has acceded.

309. The Government of Oman seeks to coordinate with the legislature and the judiciary in all areas, including human rights, and it organizes human rights training courses for staff and specialists in various sectors, with the participation of civil society organizations.

310. In its initial report, Oman has made every effort to illustrate the progress made in the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in accordance with the reporting guidelines of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. All relevant government bodies were involved in the drafting process, after which the text of the report was submitted for review to the Oman Human Rights Commission and a number of civil society organizations, who expressed their opinions and made useful comments.

311. Oman continues to consolidate its rights-based approach in all the actions and measures it takes to protect human rights and reaffirms its determination to abide by international and regional human rights instruments.

312. In submitting the present initial report to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Oman stands ready to respond to all questions and issues the Committee may raise and to provide it with any additional information and data it may request.