



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Combined third and fourth periodic reports submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic under article 18 of the Convention, due in 2018*

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



Contents

| | <i>Page</i> |
|---|-------------|
| I. Introduction | 3 |
| II. Process and methodology for the preparation of the report | 3 |
| A. Response to concluding observations that do not fall within the scope of a specific article of the Convention (general text) | 4 |
| B. Comments on the follow-up to the implementation of the Convention | 7 |
| 1. Articles 1–6 | 7 |
| Articles 1 and 2: Definition of discrimination and policies to eliminate discrimination against women | 7 |
| Article 3: Ensuring women’s development and advancement | 8 |
| Article 4: Temporary special measures | 14 |
| Article 5: Social and cultural stereotypes | 16 |
| Article 6: Combating all forms of trafficking and exploitation of women | 17 |
| 2. Articles 7–9 | 19 |
| Articles 7 and 8: Participation in political and public life | 19 |
| Article 9: Citizenship | 22 |
| 3. Articles 10–14 | 22 |
| Article 10: Education | 22 |
| Article 11: Employment | 29 |
| Article 12: Healthcare | 29 |
| Article 13: Economic and social life | 32 |
| Article 14: Rural women | 33 |
| 4. Articles 15 and 16 | 39 |
| Article 15: Equality before the law | 39 |
| Article 16: Equality in marriage and family relations | 40 |
| C. Challenges | 41 |

I. Introduction

1. The Syrian Arab Republic¹ submits to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women² its combined third and fourth periodic reports in accordance with article 18, paragraph 1, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

2. The report presents the progress made in the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women during the period 2014–2023. The report is focused on the effective application of the Convention and the changes and measures implemented in that regard. It provides responses to the recommendations put forward by the Committee in document [CEDAW/C/SYR/CO/2](#), dated 24 June 2014, after its discussion of the second periodic report. On the basis of the Committee's recommendations and its request in paragraph 53, Syria submitted written information on the steps taken to implement the recommendations contained in paragraphs 14 (a), 16, 27 (c) and (d) and 30 (c). The information submitted in follow-up to the concluding observations was received by the Committee on 19 January 2016 and issued in document [CEDAW/C/SYR/CO/2/Add.1](#), dated 29 March 2016, which was adopted pursuant to the letter of the Committee dated 10 August 2016.

3. Syria has made great efforts to fulfil its international obligations with respect to the submission of national reports to the treaty bodies. It has adopted a participatory approach with all concerned parties, including government entities, national institutions and civil society, in order to overcome the delay in submitting its periodic report that was the result of the terrorist war that has continued in parts of its territory for more than 13 years, as well as the unilateral coercive measures that have undermined its capabilities.

II. Process and methodology for the preparation of the report

4. The Syrian Commission for Family and Population Affairs³ is the entity responsible for preparing the combined third and fourth periodic report for the Committee. The report was prepared in accordance with the harmonized guidelines on reporting under international human rights treaties, including guidelines on a common core document and treaty-specific documents ([HRI/MC/2006/3](#)), the guidelines on reporting under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ([HRI/GEN/2/Rev.6](#)) and the guidance note for States parties for the preparation of reports under article 18 of the Convention in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals ([CEDAW/C/74/3](#)). Broad national consultations were held among government entities and civil society organizations, and the drafting process involved the following stages:

(a) Preparation: this stage began with the formation by the Syrian Commission of a national committee to prepare the report, chaired by the Chair of the Syrian Commission and comprising representatives of the People's Assembly, Ministries (Justice, Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, the Interior, Higher Education and Scientific Research, Local Administration and Environment and Social Affairs and Labour), the Planning and International Cooperation Commission and civil society organizations. In cooperation with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), a workshop on guidelines for the preparation of the report was held with

¹ Hereafter referred to as "Syria".

² Hereafter referred to as the "Committee".

³ Hereafter referred to as the "Syrian Commission".

a view to building the capacity of committee members and providing them with the necessary knowledge and skills;⁴

(b) Information-gathering: the national committee held several meetings and developed an action plan for the collection of information and data from the relevant Ministries, entities and parties tasked with the implementation of the recommendations. Information was provided by representatives of Ministries and agencies that are members of the national committee. Entities not represented on the committee were contacted by the Syrian Commission and asked to provide information, either through formal correspondence or direct contact. Meetings were also held with representatives of civil society organizations to discuss the information and to gather additional information. The information-gathering process continued up to the date of submission so as to reflect the most current information;

(c) Drafting: a small drafting committee was formed comprising members of the national committee, which contextualized the information received. It then tasked a national expert with preparing the final draft in accordance with the reporting methodology.

5. The report is divided into three sections. The first contains responses to concluding observations that do not fall within the scope of a specific article of the Convention (the “general context” observations). The second provides information on the promotion and protection of human rights enshrined in the articles of the Convention and is divided into four parts. It contains a description of the measures taken to comply with each article, includes responses to the concluding observations when they fall within the scope of a particular article and cites implementation indicators wherever possible. The third and final section of the report concerns the challenges to implementation posed by the difficult circumstances that the country has been experiencing over the years, and highlights some of the main ones.

A. Response to concluding observations that do not fall within the scope of a specific article of the Convention (general context)

6. Syria expresses reservations regarding some of the statements and information contained in the Committee’s observations as they fall outside the scope of the Committee’s mandate and objectives. In particular, Syria expresses reservations about the recommendations in paragraphs 8 (in particular subparagraph (c)), 11, 23, 27, 28, 30 and 40 (a). Those recommendations are based on inaccurate claims whose source is incorrect and unfounded reports circulated by certain countries to achieve political goals. Syria notes that the Committee has equated government forces and what the Committee calls “non-State armed groups”, which are armed terrorist groups that have used their crimes as a tool in their war against the Syrian State and people. Syria rejects this equivalence, because it is inaccurate both legally and factually. We urge the Committee to strive for accuracy and objectivity when relaying information and reports from such sources, and not merely accept them, in order to preserve a spirit of constructive dialogue and thus achieve the purpose of the reporting mechanism, which is to assist States parties in the optimal application of the Convention.

7. Syria has adhered to all the cessation of hostilities agreements⁵ reached over the past years to protect civilians, deliver humanitarian aid to them and facilitate their exit from terrorist areas. It has also concluded an agreement on de-escalation zones that has fostered the return of security and safety to large areas of the country. In line with its constitutional obligations, Syria has taken measures and actions to protect its

⁴ See the Committee’s recommendations in para. 51.

⁵ See the Committee’s recommendations in para. 8.

citizens from violations committed by armed terrorist groups. It has recovered large portions of the territory controlled by those groups and has restored security, stability and the rule of law to those areas, thereby contributing to the provision of protection and basic services to citizens, especially women and girls.

8. Syria is a party to most international humanitarian law instruments,⁶ including the Geneva Conventions of 1949. A national committee on international humanitarian law has been formed to oversee and coordinate national action to raise awareness of the rules of international humanitarian law and harmonize national legislation with it. The committee consists of the General Directorate of Civil Defence and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, the Interior, Justice, Defence and Higher Education, and a delegation from the International Committee of the Red Cross in Syria attends meetings as an observer. Syria is a party to eight core human rights instruments and works within its available resources to submit its periodic reports. Syria actively participates in the work of United Nations bodies responsible for promoting respect for international law and protecting human rights, women's rights in particular.

9. With regard to the ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance,⁷ Syria notes that accession to international conventions is an internal State matter. Syria is studying potential accession to new instruments and protocols in the context of its national and sovereign interests and will accede when it deems appropriate. It should be noted that Legislative Decree No. 20 (2013), which criminalizes abduction in its various forms, punishes anyone who deprives a person of liberty for political or material gain, for the purpose of revenge or retribution, for sectarian reasons or for ransom.

10. Regarding measures necessary to effectively combat impunity⁸ and ensure that allegations of human rights violations are investigated in a transparent, timely, effective and independent manner, it should be noted that Syrian criminal law punishes human rights violations and that the courts deal firmly with such crimes. All attacks on personal freedom or the sanctity of private life are criminalized under Syrian law and give rise to severe penalties, depending upon the circumstances. All citizens have the right of recourse to the law and the right to appeal, review and defence before the courts, including in all matters that fall under the Criminal Code or under special criminal laws.

11. Syria has taken strict measures to hold military personnel accountable for unlawful practices during military operations. Military personnel who commit crimes are referred to the military judiciary for investigation and held accountable for their actions in accordance with the Military Penal Code and the general Penal Code. Some sentences have been handed down while other cases are still pending before the military courts and the ordinary courts. Any complaint filed against army or armed forces personnel is dealt with according to applicable laws. A military committee of inquiry, created by the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior and other competent security agencies, which was first constituted in 2011 and has since been reconstituted several times, investigates citizens' complaints against members of the army, the security forces and the police. The committee continues to receive, process and resolve complaints. If any act that contravenes the law is proven to have taken place, the committee refers the matter to the competent court, which applies the relevant criminal law.

12. With regard to ensuring humanitarian access,⁹ Syria has facilitated humanitarian access, without discrimination, to all areas of the country, including areas that were

⁶ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 8 (a).

⁷ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 52.

⁸ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 8 (c).

⁹ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 10 (a).

classified by the United Nations as difficult to access or blockaded by armed terrorist groups listed by the Security Council, primarily Da'esh and the Nusrah Front (Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham) and groups associated with them. In coordination with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and civil society groups, the State has facilitated the humanitarian work of international governmental and non-governmental humanitarian organizations in order to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid to Syrian civilians in need. It has also highlighted the importance of preventing such aid from falling into the hands of terrorist groups. Syria has taken urgent and effective measures to ensure the immediate delivery of humanitarian support and assistance to persons affected by the earthquake of 6 February 2023 and has allowed the United Nations to use cross-border and cross-line mechanisms to deliver relief and aid to Syrian civilians in areas under the control of terrorist organizations in northern Syria.

13. With regard to the adoption of practical measures to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls, including sexual violence and sexual exploitation,¹⁰ Syrian laws criminalize and punish all forms of sexual assault offences and impose severe penalties when such offences are committed against women and children. Syria has taken a number of measures and actions to prevent all forms of violence against women in line with article 54 of the Constitution, which provides that "any assault on individual freedom, on the inviolability of private life or on any other rights and public freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution shall be considered a crime punishable by law." Several legal provisions have been amended to stiffen the penalties for such crimes. Legislative Decree No. 20 (2013), concerning the respect to abduction of persons and amending the Criminal Code, imposes hard labour for anyone who deprives a person of freedom for political or material gain, for revenge or retribution, for sectarian reasons or for ransom; the penalty is death if the perpetrator sexually assaults the victim. Currently, procedures are under way for the enactment of a comprehensive draft law that criminalizes domestic violence¹¹ and imposes criminal penalties for all forms of domestic violence, whether physical, psychological, economic or sexual.

14. With regard to the implementation of Decree No. 49 (2011) so as to ensure that it covers Syrian Kurds who remain stateless, in particular women and girls and their children,¹² it should be noted that Kurds in Syria are part of the Syrian people and are treated on an equal footing with other Syrian citizens. Of Kurds who were registered as foreigners in Hasakah, 126,501 have claimed nationality pursuant to Decree No. 49 (2011), and 87,986 people of eligible age have received identity cards. As at 2015, 15,339 children had obtained Syrian Arab nationality under the Decree. The war in the Syrian Arab Republic has limited the application of the Decree, with many eligible persons declining to apply for citizenship out of fear of the separatist "Kurdish autonomous government". Since late 2015, Kurdish separatist groups supported by the United States of America have exploited the conditions created by the ongoing terrorist war to seize areas in north-eastern Syria and forcibly exert control over Syrian citizens in the region. They have plundered the nation's wealth, especially oil and wheat, in order to achieve their separatist agenda. Kurdish separatist groups have had a grave impact on the areas they have taken over.

15. With regard to guaranteeing the right of conflict-affected women and girls to obtain all personal documents,¹³ it should be noted that Syria, within its limited available resources, is making great efforts to address the catastrophic repercussions of the war and unilateral coercive measures and strives by all means to provide basic services, including services related to civil status, to Syrians. In order to develop

¹⁰ See the Committee's recommendations in paras. 10 (c) and 27 (a).

¹¹ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 32 (a).

¹² See the Committee's recommendations in para. 38 (b).

¹³ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 38 (c).

work, improve the quality of services and simplify and streamline procedures with the aim of reducing effort and costs for citizens, Act 13 (2021), on civil status, was passed. Pursuant to the Act, the Single Syrian Registry was established, which is a single database in which all citizen information is registered regardless of location. Any Syrian citizen, male or female, may obtain any personal documents in his or her area of residence without restrictions or conditions, and access to such documents has been facilitated through decisions issued by the Ministry of the Interior. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the Syria Trust for Development also provide legal support to citizens wishing to obtain documents, especially those who lost their documents in areas controlled by armed groups or who fled or were displaced from those areas. The relevant government agencies have taken decisions and measures to facilitate the registration of civil status events inside and outside Syria. These include promulgation of Act No. 25 (2015), regarding birth registration, and the issuance of circulars by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates instructing Syrian diplomatic missions to register civil events and facilitate issuance of passports to all citizens residing abroad, to settle security status requests and to allow visits by expatriates eligible for military service.

B. Comments on the follow-up to the implementation of the Convention

1. Articles 1–6

Articles 1 and 2: Definition of discrimination and policies to eliminate discrimination against women

16. Syria is committed to implementing its obligations under the Convention. Article 19 of the 2012 Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic¹⁴ affirms that society is based on solidarity, mutual support and respect for the principles of social justice, freedom, equality and the preservation of the human dignity of every individual. The Constitution also provides that citizens are equal in rights and duties and that there must be no discrimination among them on the basis of sex, origin, language, religion or belief.¹⁵ The Constitution also guarantees the rights of the family and women in particular; the right to education and health; the responsibility of the State to ensure an intellectually and morally fit generation and to support scientific research with all the creativity, rights and duties that that requires; the right to freedom and participation in public life and work; freedom of belief; and freedom of the press.

17. In line with constitutional principles and in line with the Convention, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals, Syrian laws contain provisions prohibiting discrimination against women, especially when it leads to impairment or nullification of the recognition by women of their rights. Women have an equal right to apply for public posts, without discrimination, if they meet the conditions, academic qualifications and practical experience required. These conditions are general and abstract, granting all persons equality of opportunity to apply for such posts. The laws also guarantee equality with respect to salaries, bonuses and promotions.

18. In order to continue to promote and protect human rights and keep pace with developments and changes, the laws are subject to periodic and continual review and amendment. In recent years, Syria has endeavoured to review its laws, in particular those containing discriminatory articles. To this end, a number of laws and legislative decrees have been promulgated, including the following:¹⁶

¹⁴ Hereafter referred to as the “Constitution”.

¹⁵ See the Committee’s recommendations in para. 18 (a).

¹⁶ See the Committee’s recommendations in para. 18 (c).

(a) Legislative Decree No. 230 (2017), regarding the withdrawal of the reservation of the Syrian Arab Republic to article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;¹⁷

(b) Act No. 24 (2018), amending articles of the Criminal Code relating to the conclusion of marriage contracts outside the competent court and increasing the penalty for any person who contracts the marriage of a minor outside the court;

(c) Comprehensive review of the Personal Status Act, and promulgation of two amendments, by Act No. 4 (2019) and Act No. 20 (2019). About 75 articles of the Act were amended with a view to eliminating all discriminatory provisions and guaranteeing equality between men and women. The marriage age was raised to 18. A number of provisions concerning divorce, custody and guardianship were amended, as were provisions concerning dowries, alimony and inheritance. Women were also permitted to introduce conditions into the marriage contract in order to guarantee their rights;¹⁸

(d) Act No. 2 (2020), repealing article 548 of the Criminal Code, under which the perpetrators of “honour crimes” had been allowed to cite mitigating circumstances. Perpetrators are now punished with the penalty prescribed for the crime of murder;

(e) Act No. 13 (2021), containing the new Civil Status Act, included substantial amendments that will contribute to the development of work, improve the quality of services and simplify and streamline procedures in order to reduce the effort and costs for citizens through the creation of the Single Syrian Registry to replace the civil registries located across the regions of the Syrian Arab Republic;

(f) Act No. 21 (2021) containing the Child Rights Protection Act, which provides that there must be no discrimination between boys and girls in law or in treatment.

19. In order to raise awareness of the Convention and prepare the national report, several training workshops were held in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on the mechanism for preparing Convention-related shadow reports for non-governmental organizations (2018). In addition, a workshop was held for the drafters on the preparation of the fourth national report on the Convention (2018), as well as an introductory workshop on the Convention for members of the People’s Assembly (2019) and another for government agencies and civil society (2019); an introductory workshop for staff of the National Union of Syrian Students (2019); an introductory workshop for members of the People’s Assembly for discussion of the Convention, reservations to the Convention and the potential withdrawal of said reservations (2020); a training workshop with ESCWA on the drafting of the national report, attended by representatives of government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (2022); and a training workshop, held by the Syrian Commission, on the Convention for the representatives of government agencies and NGOs tasked with preparing the report (2022).

Article 3: Ensuring women’s development and advancement

20. Article 23 of the Constitution stipulates that the State must provide women with every possible opportunity to participate effectively and fully in political, economic, social and cultural life, and that the State must take steps to remove hindrances to their development and participation in building society. That provision is reinforced by national laws and strategies related to the empowerment of women and the

¹⁷ See the Committee’s recommendations in para. 16.

¹⁸ See the Committee’s recommendations in para. 46 (a).

promotion of their political, economic, social and cultural participation through the creation of a practical national strategy to enhance women's participation in elected councils and executive positions. To that end, steps have been taken to empower Syrian women, develop their capacities, free them from social restrictions that hinder their participation in all areas and enhance their opportunities at multiple levels and in all relevant bodies, including:¹⁹

(a) The People's Assembly: The People's Assembly has taken a number of measures to enhance the role of Syrian women in parliamentary and public life, namely:

- Formation of a committee to study and enhance legislation on women in order to remove barriers to their participation in public, political, economic and social life.
- Expansion of the duties and powers of the Committee on Women's Rights, the Family and Children of the People's Assembly in order to develop appropriate mechanisms to encourage greater participation of women in elected councils and executive management.
- The establishment of the Women's Caucus, which consists of women members of the People's Assembly, to develop an agreed-upon programme of action to support and promote women's participation in elected and executive councils. The Caucus provides a genuine working basis for strong relations with all national agencies, civil society organizations and other organizations that are concerned with women's issues.

(b) Political parties: Political parties are the most impactful and effective vehicle for candidacy in elected councils. Accordingly, the Syrian State endeavours to support and encourage political parties of all stripes through measures aimed at:

- Increasing the number of women on lists of party candidates for elected councils.
- Increasing the representation of women in party leadership posts and bodies, supporting and assisting such women and providing special amenities for them in their work.
- Establishing a support network for women candidates for parliament, local administrative councils and all other elected councils, as well as for elected women, with the aim of improving rates of empowerment, recruitment and retention (continuity).

In this regard, it should be noted that, following the promulgation of the Political Parties Act (No. 100 of 2011), 12 new parties were licensed in addition to the 10 parties of the National Progressive Front. Three parties are currently headed by women. Women account for 25 to 35 per cent of the members of the new parties. The bylaws of these parties contain an emphasis on the empowerment and inclusion of women in political life and the importance of women's leadership at various levels of the party.

(c) The Syrian Commission:²⁰ The Syrian Commission, in partnership with national organizations (governmental and non-governmental), has taken steps to implement article 3 of the Convention,²¹ including:

¹⁹ Includes response to the Committee's recommendations in para. 14.

²⁰ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 20 (a).

²¹ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 14 (b), (c) and (e).

- Preparation of a manual on capacity-building of women wishing to work in non-governmental, community and local organizations concerned with women's affairs, including with respect to women's political participation and Security Council resolutions on women and armed conflict. It includes commentary on the Convention and a summary of related general comments. Associations have been given training on the manual, and it was distributed widely with a view to increasing awareness.
- The signing in 2018 of a plan for annual cooperation with UNFPA, including with regard to activities concerning the protection and promotion of women's rights. These include support for a national programme for women's empowerment, the carrying out of national studies and awareness-raising activities on the issues of early marriage and gender-based violence and UNFPA support for the launch of an observatory on violence against women.
- Research on women's participation in elected councils and public executive bodies and administrations and provision of information on the evolution of women's participation in public life, in particular in the context of the war in Syria.
- The launch, in cooperation with the Ministry of Information and the Syria Youth Fingerprint organization, of a national campaign to increase the percentage of women candidates in local council elections and the holding of events in all governorates in cooperation with campaign partners. The table below shows a marked increase in the percentage of women participating in governorate and city councils, which reflects significant changes in the social attitudes that had long excluded women from decision-making positions.

| <i>Governorate Council</i> | <i>Pre-campaign percentage</i> | <i>Post-campaign percentage</i> |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Damascus Governorate Council | .. | 17 |
| Aleppo Governorate Council | 9 | 16 |
| Aleppo City Council | 2 | 8 |
| Dayr al-Zawr Governorate Council | 5 | 10 |
| Dayr al-Zawr City Council | 2 | 12 |
| Hama Governorate Council | 11 | 17 |
| Hama City Council | 6 | 18 |
| Raqqah Governorate | .. | 7 |
| Raqqah City Council | .. | 14 |
| Qunaytirah Governorate | .. | 8 |
| Town councils, Qunaytirah | .. | 6 |
| Tartus Governorate | .. | 11 |
| Hama City Council | .. | 11 |
| Raqqah Governorate | 4 | 12 |
| Ladhiqiyah City Council | 2 | 8 |
| Hasakah Governorate Council | 6 | 6 |
| Hasakah City Council | – | 2 |

- Organization of workshops to support and encourage unions, federations and associations (i.e. all civil society organizations) to provide opportunities for women to join their governing bodies and boards of directors.

- Capacity-building for women with respect to decision-making, expressing views and development of knowledge and management skills through development projects, training programmes and administrative development; cooperation with the Government to enhance women's leadership abilities so that they can assume leadership positions at all institutions.
- Encouragement (in partnership with the Government and civil society organizations) of the creation of more NGOs concerned with revitalizing the role of women in society and overcoming obstacles to the full exercise of that role. "Syrian women as the key to peace", co-organized by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Syrian Commission, was the first step on this path.

21. The Government, in order to enhance the protection and empowerment of women, has developed a number of programmes and strategies on protection, prevention, participation, promotion, peacebuilding and recovery that incorporate women's issues, including:

- The National Programme for Support of Women in Syria (2018–2020) was a strategy that forms part of the serious and continuous endeavours carried out by the State to further its vision of the future and its approaches to sustainable and constructive development, to achieve the advancement of women in Syria and to consolidate justice and equity.²² The Programme was developed in line with the topics and approaches of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,²³ the Convention and the Goals. Work matrices were developed for short-term (2018–2020), a medium-term (2021–2025) and a long-term (2021–2030) phases. The programme also included matrices for each topic that included the objectives, activities, implementing entities, requirements for implementation, measurement indicators, and legal and social services.
- Great importance is attached to women's issues in the National Programme for Post-War Syria (Strategy 2030),²⁴ the social and human development and the growth and development components of which are focused on achieving the aspects of the Beijing+30 review process, especially with regard to the achievement of inclusive development, shared prosperity, decent work, poverty eradication, social protection, social services and programmes for the social empowerment and training of rural women.
- The Strategic Plan for Gender Justice (2023–2030), which is based on a vision of a Syrian society in which gender equality is a precondition for sustainable development, and its implementation matrix.²⁵ The Plan is a tool for coordinating policies and actions related to gender equality by the Government and its partners and is a path that brings together all active components of society for the purpose of promoting the principles and indicators of gender equality as a human right guaranteed by the Constitution. The report submitted by ESCWA on gender justice and the law was reviewed and modified by a committee composed of the concerned government agencies. Two training workshops were held to build the capacity of representatives from the Ministry of Local Administration and Environment with respect to programmes on the gender justice plan and the mechanism for bridging the gap in gender indicators. The first workshop was held in Damascus Governorate and the second in Homs Governorate.

²² Annex I.

²³ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 48.

²⁴ Annex II.

²⁵ Annex III.

- Preparation of national sustainable development review reports (the most recent of which was the second national report (2023))²⁶ related to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 5 on gender equality, and the efforts made by Syria to provide an enabling environment to restore development pathways and to analyse related indicators and the challenges in achieving that Goal. The second national review (2023) identified the key requirements for achieving gender equality, namely, integration of women's political empowerment and leadership into national plans and programmes; policies aimed at reducing gender-based violence and countering discrimination against women; and development of a legislative framework to guarantee women's rights and eliminate all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination.
- Preparation of the sixth national review for the International Conference on Population and Development²⁷ in implementation of the recommendations of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development and the 2019 Nairobi Summit on the International Conference on Population and Development. The review addresses, inter alia, the creation of a demographically balanced society, an integrated social protection system and a society founded on cohesive Syrian families. It contains policies focused on the social and economic integration of the most vulnerable groups, primarily children and women, through a national anti-poverty and economic empowerment policy.
- Development of an integrated social services case management system, so that the necessary assistance can be provided in cases of severe social need in an appropriate and systematic manner, as well as drafting of a training manual in that regard.

22. Syria is determined to actively involve women in issues of peace and security. In 2014, it organized a conference on women's role in ending war and building peace that was attended by 600 women. One outcome of the conference was the election of a committee of women representing all strata of Syrian civil society to speak on behalf of Syrian women at relevant international and regional forums. A workshop was held in 2017 to promote the political and social empowerment of Syrian women was attended by 150 women from government agencies and civil society.

23. The Syrian Commission formed a committee to conduct a national reading of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000)²⁸ with a view to proposing a national vision regarding programmes and activities on the topic of the resolution, with consideration given to the national interest. The committee was composed of ministries, relevant authorities, representatives of civil society and national experts. In 2021, the committee attended a training course organized by the Syrian Commission in cooperation with UNFPA. In addition, workshops were held that resulted in the development of a draft national action vision based on resolution 1325 (2000) in the Syrian context.²⁹ That vision has five main pillars: protection, prevention, empowerment, participation and promotion. The areas of advocacy, relief, recovery, reconstruction, resource mobilization and monitoring and evaluation are being reviewed by relevant government agencies.

24. Between 2018 and 2022, the General Authority for National Reconciliation made efforts to involve women in the national reconciliation project. Women were involved in 33 civil committees in various governorates that played a role in initiatives for the

²⁶ Annex IV.

²⁷ Annex V.

²⁸ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 14 (f).

²⁹ See the Committee's recommendations in paras. 10 (c) and 27 (a).

return of people to areas liberated from terrorism and in ensuring safe and protective conditions for women. Women participated, directly or indirectly, in negotiations on abducted families, women and children, with positive results. Furthermore, Syria is a member of the Arab Women Mediators Network, a regional mechanism linked to Security Council resolution 1325 on women and peace and security that promotes the participation of women in the resolution of armed conflicts and in inclusive peacemaking, as they are the group most affected by conflict. The Chair of the Syrian Commission for Family and Population Affairs represents Syria in the emergency committee for the protection of women in armed conflicts, in implementation of the recommendations of the thirty-fifth session of the Arab Women's Committee, which is composed of States and experts in the field of protection of women in armed conflict.

25. A national committee composed of representatives of the relevant ministries was formed to conduct a study on legal provisions that discriminate against women. The committee completed its work and submitted it to the Ministry of Justice for its consideration in the amendment of laws. The Syrian Commission also held workshops for members of the People's Assembly to discuss discriminatory provisions in Syrian laws concerning women with a view to mobilizing support for decision-makers (the People's Assembly) and other bodies. The committee's conclusions were focused on the amendment of certain articles of the Personal Status Act, the Criminal Code, the Nationality Act, the Labour Act, the Elections Act, the Political Parties Act and the Social Insurance Act. The committee also drafted proposals.

26. In their annual budgets, national authorities allocate the necessary funds for the operational programmes of the National Strategy for the Support and Empowerment of Women and other strategies and programmes. The annual budgets of ministries and relevant authorities also allocate investments for the support and empowerment of women in line with priorities and availability of resources. The following table of allocations for 2023 and 2024 shows a notable increase for 2024:

| <i>Entity</i> | <i>Project</i> | <i>2023 allocation (thousands of Syrian pounds)</i> | <i>2024 allocation (thousands of Syrian pounds)</i> |
|---|------------------------|---|---|
| Ministry of Agriculture | Rural development | 250 000 | 1 850 000 |
| Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and Population | Family Protection Unit | 100 | 1 000 |
| Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and Population | Family empowerment | 15 000 | 15 000 |

27. The Family Protection Unit,³⁰ launched in March 2017, takes in women and children survivors of violence for a set period of up to six months and provides an integrated package of services including shelter, healthcare, psychosocial support, legal counselling and accompaniment at court, in addition to empowerment through training in professions such as sewing, hairdressing and computers. It also provides assistance with reintegration into the family environment. External clinics have been opened to provide psychosocial, legal and health services. In response to the earthquake disaster, a helpline was launched to provide psychological support and referrals to specialized medical and essential services and to detect building damage. The table below sets out the services provided by the Unit:

³⁰ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 32 (c).

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Total beneficiaries</i> | <i>Reproductive health</i> | <i>Gender-based violence services</i> | <i>Shelter</i> | <i>Professional training</i> | <i>Legal</i> |
|--------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| 2017 | 1 134 | 98 | 1 036 | 10 | 6 | 27 |
| 2018 | 2 004 | 1 681 | 323 | 8 | 86 | 79 |
| 2019 | 2 760 | 2 016 | 744 | 32 | 134 | 62 |
| 2020 | 1 495 | 1 036 | 459 | 29 | 168 | 14 |
| 2021 | 830 | 462 | 368 | 59 | 163 | 50 |
| 2022 | 1 724 | 1 126 | 578 | 29 | 366 | 60 |
| 2023 | 1 774 | 1 163 | 415 | 28 | 115 | 53 |
| 2024 ³¹ | 1 851 | 1 455 | 339 | 11 | 20 | 26 |
| Total | 13 572 | 9 037 | 4 262 | 206 | 1 058 | 371 |

28. A 24-hour toll-free hotline was launched by the Family Protection Unit to receive reports of violence against women and children. It provides legal counselling and psychosocial support services and refers callers to the Protection Unit (safe shelter). The “Don’t Stay Silent” campaign was launched to address domestic violence. Workshops were held in all governorates on raising awareness of domestic violence and the services provided by the Unit and on the launch of the helpline.

29. A national observatory on violence was launched to monitor violence against women, and a workshop was held to explain its mechanism of work and its purpose and to provide practical training on how to fill in the form. Capacity-building was provided for observatory monitors assigned to work at police stations, hospitals and certain associations. There were 18 monitors and 36 trainees; 65 per cent of latter were women.

30. The Family Protection Unit, in order to provide female victims of sexual and gender-based violence with adequate medical, social and psychological services, takes in women and child victims of violence and provides them with an integrated package of services (safe shelter, psychosocial support, legal advice and empowerment through re-entry to education or vocational training). The Unit’s medical clinics for women and children provide diagnoses, treatment and medication free of charge and provides follow-up until recovery. An integrated social services case management system has been established so that the necessary assistance can be provided in cases of severe social need in an appropriate and systematic manner, and a training manual has been drafted in that regard.

31. A number of workshops have been held in Damascus and other governorates to raise awareness about violence against women and about the services provided by the family protection unit. The workshops were aimed at police officers, lawyers and public prosecutors, as well as at social workers in NGOs and officials in government agencies that deal with cases of violence against women. Messages explaining the concept of violence, the harm it does and the penalties perpetrators can face have been disseminated via the media and social media. The Syrian Commission also held a training workshop in cooperation with ESCWA on the creation of a mechanism to develop a national strategy and to study violence against women in Arab countries.

Article 4: Temporary special measures

32. While there are no provisions in the Constitution relating to the adoption of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating substantive equality between men

³¹ Data for the first quarter of 2024 only.

and women, article 23 provides that the State must provide women with every possible opportunity to participate effectively and fully in political, economic, social and cultural life, and must take steps to remove barriers to their development and participation in building society. In other words, there is nothing to prevent the adoption of measures, be they general or special, permanent or temporary, to accelerate substantive equality between men and women. In programmes and strategies on the protection and empowerment of women, it is emphasized that women's role in society should be given special status and priority. The Syrian Commission and the Social Affairs Committee of the People's Assembly play an important role in promoting substantive equality for women, especially given the difficult circumstances caused by the war in Syria and coercive measures that have first and foremost undermined women's enjoyment of their economic rights. Programmes have been developed to finance women-led small businesses and microenterprises and to give special attention to women heads of households and women displaced by the war.

33. On 6 February 2023, a devastating earthquake struck several areas of Syria, causing heavy and widespread damage to people, society and the environment and significant loss of life. It directly damaged natural resources and infrastructure, such as drinking water systems, sewerage networks, water treatment plants, healthcare facilities, electrical networks and transformers, communications networks, schools and daycares centres, and even archaeological sites. The earthquake had catastrophic effects on women and children, and special measures were required to address its repercussions on all citizens, especially women. Pursuant to article 24 of the Constitution, which stipulates that the State, in solidarity with society, must shoulder the burdens resulting from natural disasters, the Government, in cooperation with the public and private sectors, associations, international organizations and individuals, has been working to address the aftermath of the earthquake and harness all available resources to mitigate its ramifications. The Cabinet approved a national action plan and basic instructions for the creation of a government policy to deal with the earthquake's ramifications in order to help restore normal life for those affected.

34. The national action plan is focused on providing social services to those affected, especially the most vulnerable among them. It is based on four components that address the nature and stage of the disaster. The first is to meet basic humanitarian needs in the immediate wake of the disaster, which was fully accomplished. Shelters equipped with all the necessary supplies ensured that every affected person had proper accommodation for six months. In addition, a fund was set up to accept donations from the local and international community for reconstruction of the affected areas, through which 200 million Syrian pounds' worth of tax- and fee-exempt soft loans, with a 13-year repayment period, were provided. The first instalment is due three years into the loan.

35. Efforts were also made to provide health services to those affected and to provide all shelters with medical supplies, especially for women, as well as basic healthcare services, such as vaccines, reproductive health, chronic disease medications, awareness campaigns and psychological support. The national action plan also included assistance for the restoration of normality to affected communities through cooperation between the Government and the public and private sectors to revitalize the economy. This included the creation of jobs and sources of income for those affected, the creation of small business development programmes, the provision of special grants to those affected to restore economic activity, the reopening of facilities and the rebuilding of damaged health centres. In Aleppo, 1,006 women (35 per cent), out of a total of 2,875 beneficiaries, received a cash allowance for rent. Cash allowances for basic necessities were given to 30 women (12 per cent) out of a total of 250 recipients. Twenty of those women lacked a breadwinner in the family.

In Ladhqiyyah, in-kind grants were provided to 156 people directly affected by the earthquake, including 75 women, 19 of whom were breadwinners. In addition, 67 women received agricultural equipment, 59 received cash allowances for basic necessities and 65 received a cash allowance for rent.

Article 5: Social and cultural stereotypes³²

36. The State is working assiduously to adopt measures aimed at changing social and cultural norms that hinder women's development and at eliminating stereotypes. The Syrian Commission, in cooperation with relevant partners in United Nations organizations, especially UNFPA, seeks to raise awareness through various activities such as International Women's Day celebrations and the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign. The Ministry of Education conducts periodic reviews of school curricula at all levels, taking into account student age and maturity levels, to ensure that they are free from stereotypes and to stop girls from dropping out of school.³³

37. Syria attaches great importance to women's issues and the protection of women. In recent years, Syria has been reviewing its laws, including discriminatory provisions. It has amended many of them as part of an ongoing review of the Syrian Penal Code, in particular provisions relating to so-called honour crimes,³⁴ and the Personal Status Act. The law punishes all forms of sexual assault, especially against women and children, and imposes severe criminal penalties on the perpetrators. Modern criminal law is strict in that regard.

38. Within the framework of combating stereotypes and practices harmful to women, the Syrian Commission undertook a study of the economic, social and cultural factors conducive to early marriage, with the aim of developing action programmes to reduce the phenomenon. A study was also done on the economic cost of early marriage, which attempted to calculate the economic costs of early marriage and the effects of early marriage on a wide range of development outcomes. The aim was to demonstrate that investment in ending early marriage not only was necessary from a humanitarian and social standpoint, but that it also reduces waste of human and material resources and ensures optimal utilization of social and economic development dividends. That has helped to mobilize greater commitments at the family and societal levels (government and civil society) towards ending early marriage.

39. The Syrian Commission developed a plan to reduce the rate of early marriage from 13 to 5 per cent, which Syria committed to at the 2019 Nairobi Summit. A government study on the societal determinants of early marriage and another on the economic cost of early marriage were launched with the aim of developing action programmes to curb the phenomenon. As a measure to curb early marriages and harmful practices, the Criminal Code (Act 24 of 2018) was amended to increase the penalty for the contracting of a marriage outside of court for a person under 18 years of age.

40. From 2013 to 2023, the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with international organizations, conducted more than 105 training courses and workshops on changing stereotypes and combating gender-based violence in Syrian governorates, more than 10 training courses on school violence and bullying and more than 500 courses and workshops on psychological support.

³² See the Committee's recommendations in para. 22.

³³ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 40 (b).

³⁴ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 25.

41. The Ministry of Information has held special programmes, seminars and discussions to highlight women's economic, social and health issues, to empower them and to change stereotypical attitudes about their role, which have been disseminated via print, audio-visual media, web sites and social media. Workshops have also been held to build the capacity of media professionals with respect to gender issues, to draft a special training manual on gender-based violence and to discuss the provisions, content and objectives of international conventions. Over past decades, Syrian drama serials have presented positive depictions of women's current and future roles. An annual award is presented for the best media dealing with women's issues. Television segments have been produced that deal with early marriage and its impact on women and society, the negative repercussions of high population growth, polygamy, women and the law, women's work, women's health and so on. A national technical media committee concerned with women's and children's issues, whose membership is about 80 per cent women, has been formed to monitor women's issues.

42. The Ministry of Information has held workshops explaining the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Workshops on the situation of women in media organizations and on reproductive health were held in a number of governorates. Three workshops have been held for screenwriters and producers on population issues, women's role and reproductive health. Seven television spots have been produced on the importance of girls' education and 10 television segments have dealt with violence in its various forms. Other television spots have been produced on violence against women and early marriage.

43. The Syrian Commission, in order to strengthen protection from gender-based violence, has taken the following measures:

- The Family Protection Unit takes in women and children victims of violence and provides an integrated package of services such as safe shelter, psychosocial support, legal advice, medical services and economic empowerment through vocational training. It receives an average of 80 cases per protection cycle, whose duration ranges from 20 days to 6 months.
- An integrated social services case management system has been established so that the necessary assistance can be provided in cases of severe social need in an appropriate and systematic manner, and a training manual has been drafted in that regard.
- A national violence observatory, which monitors violence through coordination with governmental and non-governmental organizations, has been established.
- A temporary care centre for girls who are homeless or beggars was opened in Damascus Governorate, in cooperation with the Child Rights Association.
- A gender-responsive budget has been developed that covers programme needs relating to women, children, gender, population studies and other areas of focus of the Syrian Commission's work. Funds amounting to 2,492,000 in 2022 and 18,000,000 in 2023 were allocated for gender mainstreaming.
- A draft law criminalizing domestic violence in all its forms has been prepared in cooperation with national experts, and the enactment process is underway.³⁵

Article 6: Combating all forms of trafficking and exploitation of women

44. Pursuant to Act No. 3 (2010) on countering trafficking in persons, a national committee was formed on countering trafficking in persons, which is composed of

³⁵ See the Committee's recommendations in paras. 32 (a) and (b).

representatives from ministries, concerned authorities and civil society. The national committee drafted national plans, periodically updated, covering the periods 2014–2016 and 2018–2020. In 2020, the national committee was reconstituted with the Minister of the Interior as chair and an expanded membership. A national plan covering the period 2023–2026 was recently developed that takes into account the catastrophic effects of the war on the Syrian people. One of those effects is vulnerability to exploitation, especially in countries of asylum and in camps in particular, where people have fallen victim to sexual exploitation, organ removal and other forms of trafficking in persons.

45. The national committee to combat trafficking in persons is developing comprehensive national policies to prevent human trafficking, protect and assist victims and prosecute offenders. The intention is to prevent and punish trafficking in persons in all its forms as well as to strengthen national and international partnerships. The plan for the period 2023–2026 has four main components:³⁶

- Prevention and community awareness-raising.
- Protecting and assisting victims and reintegrating them into society.
- Prosecution and punishment.
- Promotion of international cooperation and partnerships.

46. The Ministry of the Interior develops programmes to raise awareness of the Act and warn of the danger of trafficking in persons through campaigns, conferences and seminars and lectures at universities, colleges and schools at all levels, as well as through cooperation with relevant civil society organizations. In addition, it also uses informational brochures, radio and television interviews and signs in public areas, ports of entry and airports to raise awareness of the crime of trafficking in persons. In cooperation with international organizations operating in Syria, capacity-building workshops have been held for anti-trafficking staff at relevant ministries (Justice, the Interior, Social Affairs, Labour and Health), the Syrian Commission and NGOs.

47. Act No. 14 (2021) was promulgated to prevent people smuggling, impose severe penalties on perpetrators and protect victims. It contains an emphasis on special protection for smuggled women, children and persons with disabilities, and requires that appropriate response measures be taken and that the best interests of children be given priority.

48. Act No. 10 (2014), on recruitment bureaux and Syrian citizen employed as domestic workers, regulates the operation of employment bureaux and the contractual relationships between domestic workers, employers and bureaux. It sets out the obligations and rights of each party in order to protect domestic workers from trafficking and provides that employers must register domestic employees with the workers' compensation fund of the branch of the General Organization for Social Insurance in the governorate of residence. This must be done during the period of employment. The Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, as an anti-trafficking measure, work together to follow up on cases involving foreign workers and provide legal support to non-Syrian victims working in Syria.

49. Article 47 of the Child Rights Act (Act No. 21 of 2021) provides for the protection of children from trafficking. It stipulates that the State must guarantee protection of children from trafficking in any form. Under the Act, trafficked children are considered victims and are not criminally or civilly liable for criminal acts arising from that status. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour works to rehabilitate child victims of trafficking at centres set up for this purpose.

³⁶ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 34.

50. The Syrian Commission has drafted a guide on psychosocial support for women and children victims of trafficking in persons, especially children recruited into armed forces. Psychological, social and legal care programmes have been developed for victims of trafficking in persons, which ensure meticulous application of the provisions law relating to protection measures, psychosocial recovery, access to appropriate care, confidentiality and privacy and legal advice and assistance upon request.

51. Shelters for the protection of victims of trafficking in persons in Aleppo and Damascus were taken out of service as they were targeted during the terrorist war on Syria. Alternative shelters were therefore created, including by the Family Protection Unit of the Syrian Commission. The Unit is also responsible for receiving and investigating complaints of child abuse and abuse of women and referring them to the competent authorities. The section tasked with receiving women and children at the Department for Combating Trafficking in Persons has been revamped in accordance with international standards.

52. Efforts to reduce cross-border trafficking in persons have been hindered by the country's situation and the reluctance of a number of States and international and regional organizations to cooperate with Syria in combating trafficking in persons. In particular, certain neighbouring States have set up camps in which they have detained Syrians and horrendously exploited them in a manner tantamount to trafficking, through child marriage, sexual exploitation or trafficking in human organs. However, cooperation agreements have been concluded with Indonesia and the Philippines to protect female domestic workers and combat trafficking in persons, and memoranda of understanding have been signed with Iraq, Iran and the Russian Federation on cooperation to combat trafficking in persons.³⁷

53. The National Committee has developed a media plan regarding trafficking in persons. The plan contains a comprehensive strategic vision of the media's role in supporting and promoting human rights and confronting human rights violations of all types. It also involves the development of an integrated programme when it comes to the treatment of any form of trafficking in persons and media treatment of issues that give rise to the phenomenon. Implementation of the plan will involve the production of documentaries on trafficking in persons and national, regional and international efforts to address those crimes. It also involves talk shows of various types and a range of educational materials, as well as comprehensive coverage in news publications, programmes and commentary and analysis. The national committee has also trained media professionals on how to treat the issue.

54. The Department for Combating Trafficking in Persons of the Ministry of Interior is working to create an integrated database for the collection, analysis and exchange of accurate information on the extent and seriousness of this phenomenon.

2. Articles 7–9

Articles 7 and 8: Participation in political and public life³⁸

55. Under the Constitution, women and men are equal with regard to political and public office. Article 26 of the Constitution affirms that citizens are equal in assuming the functions of public service. Article 34 stipulates that every citizen has the right to participate in political, economic, social and cultural life, and that this is to be regulated by law. Women have made outstanding progress with respect to representation in decision-making bodies through participation in the political, economic, social, cultural, health, education and labour arenas. This is enshrined in

³⁷ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 34 (d).

³⁸ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 36.

the General Elections Act (No. 5 of 2014), which does not discriminate between men and women with respect to candidacy in and election to the People's Assembly and local councils.

56. The positions of Vice-President of the Republic (since 2006) and Speaker of the People's Assembly (since 2016) have been held by women, a first among Arab parliaments. Women accounted for 11.2 per cent of members of the People's Assembly at its first legislative session (2020–2024) and chaired two of its committees. Women have been members of the Constitutional Court since 2012 and have served as Public Prosecutor of the Republic, minister, deputy minister, director-general and judge (at all courts – civil, criminal and administrative). They have chaired a grass-roots organization, a professional union and a political party, and have held the office of vice-president of a university, dean of a faculty and offices in the diplomatic corps.

57. Women have been represented in official delegations to international conferences, in the national dialogue meetings held in Geneva, Sochi and Astana, in national reconciliation committees and in related civil society initiatives. Syrian women also participate in discussions in international forums, especially those related to women's issues, and contribute to the drafting of the final documents and resolutions issued by them, either as observers at these discussions or as diplomats in the permanent mission to the United Nations headquarters in New York or its offices in Geneva or Vienna.

58. The Constitution and the General Elections Act provide that men and women are equal when it comes to candidacy and elections. Citizens are equal in rights and duties and there is no discrimination among them on the basis of sex, origin, language, religion or belief (art. 33, para. 3). Article 59 of the Constitution defines voters as citizens who have attained 18 years of age and who meet the conditions stipulated in the Act. The Act defines a voter as any citizen with electoral rights. A candidate is any citizen who wishes to run for office. All of these texts are general, with no distinction made between men and women.

59. According to the Political Parties Act and the General Elections Act, women have the right to participate in political life, as citizens are equal in rights and duties. Women make up more than 30 per cent of members of licensed political parties and, in some cases, more than 36 per cent. Three women hold the position of secretary-general of a licensed party. Women's representation among party leadership varies according to party, and ranges from 25 per cent to 35 per cent. The by-laws of these parties emphasize women's empowerment, women's participation in political life and the ability of women to hold party leadership positions at various levels.

60. Women's representation in local administrative councils currently stands at 7.2 per cent. Women make up 44.3 per cent of all public employees in the country and 10 per cent of the 2021 Government.³⁹ Women make up about 18.3 per cent of judges, a percentage that is increasing. In 2021, of 66 judges enrolled in the Judicial Institute, 37, or more than 57 per cent, were women. Women held 47.6 per cent of posts at the Ministry of Justice. Of the lawyers at the State Litigation Department, 37.5 per cent are women. Women occupy judicial posts in the Council of State, since Decree No. 34 (2020) stipulates that 5 of the 15 judges appointed to the Council must be women. Women make up 55 per cent of the Ministry of Higher Education and 36.4 per cent of lawyers in the Bar Association.

61. Article 26 of the Constitution affirms that public service is a duty and an honour, the purpose of which is to serve the public interest and the people. It adds that citizens are equal in assuming the functions of public service. The law sets out the conditions

³⁹ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 36.

for assuming such functions and the rights and duties of those entrusted with them. The Basic Act on State Employees (No. 51 of 2004) provides for equality between male and female citizens with regard to appointment to a public office, salaries, promotion and bonuses. Article 119 of the Labour Code (No. 17 of 2010) stipulates that all provisions governing workers' employment must be applicable to women employees, without discrimination, for work of the same kind. Similarly, the Social Insurance Act (No. 92 of 1959) provides for equal insurance benefits for women and men. Although the Private Associations and Institutions Act (No. 93 of 1958) guarantees women's participation in the establishment and management of associations, the laws and procedures governing the work of NGOs are being revised to comply with international human rights standards.⁴⁰

62. Indicators relating to women's representation in various positions:

- **Government.** The proportion of women members of successive governments may not be less than 10 per cent. For example, four women currently hold the office of minister (Minister of Culture, Minister of Administrative Development, Minister of Local Administration and Minister of State). In addition, the Central Oversight and Inspection Commission, which is the highest oversight and inspection body in Syria, has been chaired by a woman since 2017. Two women hold the position of adviser in the Office of the President of the Republic. The legislative decree regulating the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates (No. 20 of 2016) enshrines equal opportunity for women and men to join the diplomatic and administrative corps and guarantees equality between men and women with regard to the criteria for appointment, evaluation, promotion, leave, compensation and financial and family benefits. Women have held the position of ambassador and head of diplomatic mission in several countries. Out of a total of 219 diplomats at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 61 are women. In the period 2017–2023, 43.1 per cent of diplomats were women.
- **Local councils.** Women are represented at all levels of local administration, and their participation rate increased from 7.02 per cent in 2018 to 12.47 per cent in 2022.
- **Trade unions.** The General Federation of Trade Unions has issued a decision aimed at increasing the participation of women in all trade union activities and events, including in national and international delegations, to at least 25 per cent.
- **Public service and contracting.** Pursuant to the constitutional principle that citizens are equal with regard to appointment to public service, the Basic Act on State Employees (No. 51 of 2004) enshrines the principle of non-discrimination between male and female citizens when it comes to appointment to public service.

Appointments are made competitively and according to need and the required competences. The Ministry of Administrative Development has created a new method for appointment and contracting to fill public posts. It has announced a centralized competition for category I and II public agency appointments and contracts and an examination for categories III, IV and V permanent appointments or annual temporary contracts. Some 205,000 applicants applied for the centralized competition for all categories, 33,000 of whom were successful. The percentage of women accepted was higher than that of men, in particular in categories I and II (see table below):

⁴⁰ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 36 (c).

| <i>Category</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> |
|------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Category I (university students +) | 1 734 | 8 648 |
| Category II: institutes | 1 821 | 4 777 |
| Category II: secondary school | 1 883 | 2 774 |
| Category III | 274 | 136 |
| Category IV | 4 142 | 2 025 |
| Category V | 3 014 | 1 772 |
| Total | 12 868 | 20 132 |

The following table shows the distribution of men and women by governorate:

| <i>Governorate</i> | <i>Men</i> | <i>Women</i> |
|--------------------|------------|--------------|
| Damascus | 1 513 | 3 473 |
| Rif Dimashq | 476 | 1 766 |
| Qunaytirah | 338 | 211 |
| Suwayda' | 921 | 1 180 |
| Dar'a | 497 | 1 727 |
| Homs | 1 871 | 1 625 |
| Hama | 1 627 | 3 525 |
| Tartus | 1 237 | 569 |
| Ladhiqiyah | 1 634 | 1 151 |
| Idlib | 70 | 95 |
| Aleppo | 1 375 | 2 984 |
| Dayr al-Zawr | 807 | 1 086 |
| Hasakah | 313 | 424 |
| Raqqah | 189 | 316 |

Article 9: Citizenship

63. Article 48 of the Constitution stipulates that Syrian Arab nationality is regulated by law. The law gives women the right to acquire, change or retain their nationality. A wife is not required automatically to change her nationality as a result of a change in her husband's. Amendment of the Nationality Act, promulgated by Legislative Decree No. 276 (1969), to allow Syrian women to confer Syrian nationality to children of a non-Syrian father is under consideration. However, circumstances in the country and the influx of terrorists have meant that, to date, no amendment has been promulgated.⁴¹

3. Articles 10–14

Article 10: Education

64. The Constitution guarantees equality before the law in education, without discrimination. Educational policy in Syria is based on constitutional principles, which provide for mandatory primary education. These principles are strictly applied through the laws on basic, secondary and university education, which provide for:

⁴¹ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 18 (c).

- Full equality in admission requirements throughout all levels of education.
- Full equality in teaching, examinations, degrees, grants, awards and privileges.
- Full equality in access to research tools, libraries and laboratories.
- Full equality in the selection of faculty members for promotion, awards and privileges.

65. The Ministry of Education is making great efforts in the face of the country's situation to promote the right to education, achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all and achieve Goal 5 on achieving gender equality, empowering women and girls and ensuring equal access to quality education for females and males of all ages. The Ministry has also worked to support the return of children, especially girls, to school and prevent them from dropping out. In cooperation with international organizations, it has provided many services to encourage male and female students to return to school and to reduce the dropout rate:

- A project, in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), on girls' education has opened classes for the 1–10-year-old age group, in which an intensive curriculum is taught to girls who have dropped out or who are not enrolled, with the aim of bringing them back to school.
- Part-time schools were expanded during the crisis to provide education facilities for male and female students and reduce attrition.
- Two-month remedial courses were offered as part of a project for alternative education opportunities.

More female students (22,854) than male students (13,773) took advantage of these opportunities. The pass rate for female students was 83 per cent compared to 77 per cent for male students. The remedial courses addressed the attrition that arose as a result of the crisis. A remedial programme for failing students was implemented in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in all Syrian governorates.

Following are some parity index indicators:

(a) The table below shows the percentage of female students enrolled in school compared to male students:

| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Number of students | 3 624 912 | 3 624 621 | 3 615 790 | 3 651 923 | 3 703 128 |
| Girl students | 1 790 471 | 1 795 902 | 1 791 267 | 1 818 616 | 1 848 808 |
| Percentage of girl students | 49.4 | 49.5 | 49.5 | 49.8 | 49.9 |

(b) The table below shows the parity index for boys and girls in the first grade (6-year-olds):

| School year | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 |
|--------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Boys | 40.6% | 54.6% | 46.2% | 48.8% |
| Girls | 37.7% | 51.3% | 43.8% | 45.4% |
| Parity index | 93% | 94% | 95% | 93% |

(c) The table below shows the net primary education enrolment rate from ages 6 to 14, with the parity index. Education sector indicators show a convergence in net enrolment of girls and boys in primary education, which corresponds to their share of the population for that age group:

| <i>School year</i> | <i>2018/19</i> | <i>2019/20</i> | <i>2020/21</i> | <i>2021/22</i> |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Boys | 58.8% | 81.1% | 73.9% | 68.4% |
| Girls | 57.1% | 78.4% | 71.7% | 66.9% |
| Parity index | 97% | 97% | 97% | 98% |

(d) The table below shows the sixth-grade completion rate. Education sector indicators show a convergence between the sixth-grade completion rates for girls and boys. The parity index remained steady during the period 2019–2023, indicating that girls' access to educational opportunities is equal to that of boys:

| <i>School year</i> | <i>2018/19</i> | <i>2019/20</i> | <i>2020/21</i> | <i>2021/22</i> |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Boys | 58% | 84% | 77% | 73% |
| Girls | 58% | 83% | 76% | 72% |
| Parity index | 100% | 99% | 99% | 99% |

(e) The table below shows the ninth-grade completion rate. Educational sector indicators show that the ninth-grade completion rate for girls and boys is proportional to the general population and favours girls, as boys have entered the labour market because of current economic conditions. The parity index remained steady during the period 2019–2023.

| <i>School year</i> | <i>2018/19</i> | <i>2019/20</i> | <i>2020/21</i> | <i>2021/22</i> |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Boys | 41% | 55% | 60% | 56% |
| Girls | 45% | 61% | 63% | 63% |
| Parity index | 109% | 111% | 106% | 112% |

66. Pursuant to Act No. 38 (2021), vocational high schools were turned into production centres, which contributed to increased demand for vocational education and a greater role for vocational high schools in the labour market. Admission procedures in vocational education were modified and developed to increase university admission rates. Links between vocational education and the labour market were strengthened to promote the dual education system and to enable female students to acquire the necessary labour market skills and achieve economic independence. The table below shows the percentage of female workers in vocational high schools in 2022 as a percentage of male workers:

| <i>Teachers</i> | <i>Crafts teachers</i> | <i>Engineers</i> | <i>Administrators</i> | <i>Employees</i> |
|-----------------|------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| 78.4% | 46.8% | 62.9% | 3.6% | 42.2% |

The table also shows the total number of female students in secondary education by specialization:

| <i>Educational stage</i> | <i>2019</i> | | <i>2020</i> | | <i>2021</i> | | <i>2022</i> | |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | <i>Boys</i> | <i>Girls</i> | <i>Boys</i> | <i>Girls</i> | <i>Boys</i> | <i>Girls</i> | <i>Boys</i> | <i>Girls</i> |
| Secondary industrial | 38 256 | 5 173 | 39 722 | 5 468 | 43 844 | 5 303 | 44 498 | 5 697 |
| Secondary commercial | 10 261 | 10 208 | 11 032 | 10 939 | 11 770 | 11 164 | 10 549 | 10 166 |
| Girls' secondary | 109 | 10 145 | 376 | 11 479 | 459 | 12 402 | 242 | 12 721 |
| Total | 48 626 | 25 526 | 51 130 | 27 886 | 56 073 | 28 869 | 55 289 | 28 584 |

67. The table below shows the parity indicators for completion of the third year of secondary school:

| <i>School year</i> | <i>2018/19</i> | <i>2019/20</i> | <i>2020/21</i> | <i>2021/22</i> | <i>2022/23</i> |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Male students | 75% | 78% | 78% | 74% | 74% |
| Female students | 73% | 73% | 73% | 71% | 72% |
| Parity index | 98% | 93% | 94% | 96% | 98% |

The first-year completion rate is shown in the table below:

| <i>School year</i> | <i>2018/19</i> | <i>2019/20</i> | <i>2020/21</i> | <i>2021/22</i> | <i>2022/23</i> |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Male | 23% | 31% | 32% | 28% | .. |
| Female | 25% | 34% | 34% | 33% | .. |
| Parity index | 111% | 110% | 108% | 118% | .. |

Education sector indicators show that girls' and boys' completion rates for the third year of secondary school (general and vocational, all subjects) approximates their relative percentage of the general population. The indicator favours girls, due to the high level of awareness in Syria of the importance of education, especially girls' education.

68. The educational sector suffered significant material and human damage and losses as a result of the terrorist war and unilateral coercive measures.⁴² The Government has worked intensively to ensure the continuity of education and prevent schools from being targeted, by tightening security, protecting the roads leading to schools, compensating educational losses for all students throughout Syria and to meet challenges. For example, additional school buildings have been secured outside organizational and administrative boundaries; 127 prefabricated classrooms were provided in 2020; free education supplies were made available; and around 337 health facilities and water and sanitation systems were set up in 2020, with support from international organizations. The Government has spread awareness about health and preventive measures by means of campaigns in schools, in order to ensure a safe environment, drinking water and sterilization materials, in particular during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The table below shows the total number of schools and educational buildings that were restored, repaired or renovated, with funding from either the Government or international organizations, from 2018 to 2023:

⁴² See the Committee's recommendation in para. 40 (a). As set out in para. 6 above, Syria has expressed reservations about the wording of that recommendation.

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Government funding</i> | <i>Funding from international organizations</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|--------------|---------------------------|---|---------------|
| 2018 | 1 849 | 209 | 2 058 |
| 2019 | 1 876 | 352 | 2 228 |
| 2020 | 1 244 | 162 | 1 406 |
| 2021 | 2 419 | 342 | 2 761 |
| 2022 | 2 155 | 326 | 2 481 |
| 2023 | 2 378 | 495 | 2 873 |
| Total | 19 806 | 2 464 | 22 270 |

69. The State supported the development and modernization of school curricula in cooperation with UNICEF, as well as the printing of two million textbooks in 2020. Some schools now operate on shifts (morning and evening) to accommodate students coming from areas controlled by armed terrorist groups, and capacity-building has been provided to administrative and teaching staff. In remote areas, issues related to access have been solved through the use of tents, portables, desert schools and amalgamated classes.

70. The State offers education and safe and equitable access for all, especially for those displaced or directly affected by the war,⁴³ by providing facilities for children who do not have school documents, re-enrolling children who have been deprived of education and promoting, in cooperation with international organizations, alternative learning opportunities to improve enrolment rates, as a humanitarian response. Flexible educational pathways have been implemented to make up for educational losses (drop-outs and students never enrolled) through:

(a) Intensive education under the alternative education system (group B curriculum), wherein the Ministry of Education counts the number of children of school age in liberated areas and enrolls them directly into schools; by way of example, a total of 373,256 pupils benefited from the category B curriculum during the period between 2016 and 2021.

| <i>School year</i> | <i>Boys</i> | <i>Girls</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|--------------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| 2017/18 | 65 796 | 58 363 | 124 159 |
| 2018/19 | 63 812 | 56 602 | 120 414 |
| 2019/20 | 62 588 | 55 957 | 118 545 |
| 2020/21 | 47 685 | 42 643 | 90 328 |
| 2021/22 | 35 731 | 31 565 | 67 296 |
| 2022/23 | 27 446 | 25 577 | 53 023 |

(b) Self-study as a means of reaching students in remote and besieged areas (230,535 students).

| <i>School year</i> | <i>No. of students</i> |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| 2019/20 | 55 146 |
| 2020/21 | 14 595 |
| 2021/22 | 51 220 |
| 2022/23 | 32 890 |

⁴³ See the Committee's recommendations in paras. 40 (b) and (c).

(c) Remedial education and school clubs.

71. Since 2017, the Ministry, in cooperation with UNICEF and civil society organizations and associations, has been running a hosting program under which students from remote areas and from Lebanon are taken in and are able to sit the national examinations for certificates in basic and secondary education. Under the programme, the students are given residency, remedial classes, material support, food, accommodation and a transportation allowance during the examination period. In the school year 2020/21, 13,822 students were enrolled in the programme; 5,854 of those enrolled reside in guest centres, of whom 4,401 are following courses for the primary education certificate and 1,453 are following courses for the secondary education certificate, while 3,884 are following the remedial course. In 2021, 4,896 female students came from areas controlled by armed groups or from Lebanon to take the examinations for primary or secondary education certificates in the governorates of Rif Dimashq, Aleppo, Idlib, Raqqah and Dayr al-Zawr. In 2022, the number was 5,406 and in 2023, 4,999.

72. In collaboration with UNESCO, the Ministry of Education has developed a remedial education programme that allows weaker students to improve their performance and move to a higher grade. More than 60,000 students have benefited from this initiative since 2016. In addition, in the school year 2020/21, supplementary courses on basic subjects were run, benefiting 24,207 students at 140 centres across all governorates.

73. The Ministry of Education is working to provide a school environment that takes account of children with disabilities. To that end, it has expanded its integrated schools and supplied them with building codes and hearing and vision aids. In 2020, 18 resource rooms were equipped with educational devices and are being run in collaboration with UNICEF. Resource room teachers have been trained in the integrated education system. Health facilities for children with disabilities have been set up and work is ongoing to link integrated schools to vocational projects that benefit such children. The Ministry has set up a committee to adapt school curricula to the needs of persons with disabilities.

74. There has been a noticeable increase in female enrolment in universities and institutes of higher learning. Their excellent performance in graduate and specialized studies and in research and academics is the result of assiduous planning and follow-through, as well as the availability of educational services and supportive objective conditions. The policy of supporting free and accessible education is a major factor in the achievement of progress and sustainable development and a contributor to the cultural, social and economic advancement of society. The gender distribution in colleges is linked to the social and cultural reality in Syria, which has bridged gaps and brought about equal access to education. The table below shows the number of students enrolled in postgraduate studies, a high percentage of whom are female:

| <i>Academic year</i> | <i>No. of postgraduate students</i> | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|---|
| | <i>Female</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Ratio of female to male students</i> |
| 2018/19 | 15 615 | 17 725 | 88% |
| 2019/20 | 15 939 | 18 132 | 87% |
| 2020/21 | 16 957 | 20 942 | 80% |
| 2021/22 | 16 693 | 19 809 | 84% |
| 2022/23 | 19 212 | 17 178 | 89% |

The following table shows the number of students who have completed graduate studies:

| <i>Academic year</i> | <i>Students who have completed graduate studies</i> | | |
|----------------------|---|-------------|------------------------------|
| | <i>Female</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Ratio, female to male</i> |
| 2014/15 | 2 936 | 1 853 | 158% |
| 2015/16 | 3 008 | 1 840 | 163% |
| 2016/17 | 3 121 | 2 012 | 155% |
| 2017/18 | 3 990 | 2 479 | 160% |
| 2018/19 | 3 698 | 2 216 | 166% |
| 2019/20 | 3 526 | 1 883 | 187% |
| 2020/21 | 3 348 | 2 410 | 138% |
| 2021/22 | 3 458 | 2 379 | 145% |

75. Figures show that the ratio of women teaching staff in universities is narrowing, as are the ratios of women taking academic leave and contributing to research. Figures also show that there is equality of opportunity when it comes to secondment, study abroad and opportunities to assume administrative and leadership positions. Women make up a high proportion of department chairs, faculty deans and deputy deans, university administrators and vice-presidents, and a woman has held the position of Minister of Higher Education.

76. Women also receive a high percentage of grants from the Scientific Research and Technological Development Support Fund for Higher Education faculty members, as the table below shows:

| | <i>First announcement (2015)</i> | <i>Second announcement (2016)</i> | <i>Third announcement (2021)</i> | <i>Fourth announcement (2022) (proposed funding)</i> |
|--|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Number of research studies funded | 12 | 6 | 6 | 3 |
| Number of research studies supported (women) | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Ratio to men | 8.3% | 16.7% | 33.3% | 66.7% |

77. The table below shows the number of applications for funding for graduate theses (master's and doctoral) at Syrian public universities from the Scientific Research and Technological Development Support Fund for Higher Education.

| | <i>First announcement (2017)</i> | <i>Second announcement (2018)</i> | <i>Third announcement (2019)</i> | <i>Fourth announcement (2021)</i> | <i>Fifth Announcement (2022)</i> |
|---|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Number of research studies funding | 1 | 11 | 15 | 10 | 28 |
| Number of research studies funded (women) | – | 6 | 10 | 9 | 17 |
| Ratio to men | 0% | 54.5% | 66.7% | 90% | 60.7% |

Article 11: Employment

78. Under the Labour Act (No. 17 of 2010) and Act No. 50 (2004) on State employees, men and women are equal in rights. Chapter 3 of the Labour Act regulates issues related to the employment of women. According to article 119, all provisions governing the employment of workers apply to women workers, without discrimination, assuming similar working conditions. The State is obligated to provide equal opportunities to all citizens, without discrimination. The Labour Act prohibits any breach or infringement of the principle of equality of opportunity or equal treatment on any grounds whatsoever. In particular, it prohibits discrimination against workers on the basis of race, colour, gender, marital status, belief, political opinion, trade union membership, nationality, social origin, clothing or style of dress, without prejudice to personal freedom. This applies to any matter relating to employment, the organization of work, vocational training, wages, promotion, eligibility for social benefits, disciplinary measures and actions and dismissal. Under article 67, an employer may not discriminate on the basis of gender when dismissing a worker. Dismissal on such grounds is considered unjustified and, in such cases, the competent courts are to rule for reinstatement of the worker with the full wage paid for the period of suspension. Workers who have been unfairly dismissed have the right to file a claim before the competent court for compensation for material and moral damages.

79. The Syrian Commission conducted a field study in Damascus and Rif Dimashq Governorates on means and mechanisms for community empowerment of women breadwinners. The study was aimed at shedding light on the social and economic conditions of women breadwinners and identifying the key challenges they face in order to support and empower them through training on income-generating small enterprises and microenterprises. The study was important because it highlighted the role of civil society organizations in providing appropriate support to women breadwinners, be that temporary assistance or assistance of a nature that enables sustainable development.

Article 12: Healthcare

80. The Ministry of Health seeks to develop an integrated health system, provide health services and promote the general health of the population by improving health indicators and equitably distributing health services in coordination with other sectors and agencies. Special attention is given to women in the form of preconception, prenatal and postnatal care, reproductive health, chronic disease care, early detection of cancer and vaccines. The Ministry provides free health services to all citizens at health centres and public hospitals or, for a nominal fee, at independent facilities.⁴⁴

81. In 2022, the Ministry of Health launched a national strategy for the health of women, adolescents and children for the period 2022–2025. The strategy is consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals, to which Syria is committed, and with global strategies. Its main focuses are a commitment to improving the health of women, adolescents and children through multisectoral interventions; improvement of the quality of services and reducing gaps. The strategy's general objectives are as follows:⁴⁵

- Ensuring equitable access to comprehensive, integrated and quality health services for women, children and adolescents.

⁴⁴ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 40 (d).

⁴⁵ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 40 (d).

- Strengthening systems for the collection, provision, accessibility, quality and dissemination of strategic information, including health data and statistics on women's, children's and adolescents' health.
- Strengthening social and behavioural health skills and practices and community engagement to make maternal, child and adolescent health outcomes more equitable.
- Ensuring an effective health workforce that promotes the achievement of strategic goals.
- Forming effective and impactful partnerships in achieving the strategy's goals.

82. Many health centres damaged during the war have been repaired, which has contributed to an increase in the number of visitors to health services.

| <i>Year</i> | <i>2019</i> | <i>2020</i> | <i>2021</i> | <i>2022</i> |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Number of health centres and specialized clinics affiliated with the Ministry of Health | 1 114 | 1 218 | 1 234 | 1 234 |

83. Demand for services and visits to health centres was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and resources allocated to health centres were diverted to the purchase of protective equipment to respond to the emergency. A guide to the maintenance of basic health services during the COVID-19 pandemic was drafted as a practical reference for the provision of primary healthcare services. More people are taking advantage of the services of health centres as families have returned and settled nearby. Usage has also increased with the end of the pandemic and emergency quarantine measures and due to restored access to contraception and women's supplements and medicines after repeated disruptions related to the situation in the country.

84. Efforts are being made to provide quality health services to women in order to reduce illness and enhance health. A new preconception care service was introduced at the beginning of 2021. It consists of preventive and therapeutic procedures aimed at preconception detection and intervention to mitigate health, behavioural, social and environmental risks that could affect health, pregnancy and delivery in order to ensure the best outcome: a healthy pregnancy and safe delivery. The table below sets out the number of beneficiaries of preconception care services:

| <i>2021</i> | <i>2022</i> | <i>As at mid-2023</i> |
|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| 14 918 | 31 847 | 19 641 |

85. Pregnancy care and family planning methods and counselling have been provided to women at health centres across the governorates (with the exception of Raqqah and Idlib Governorates, due to security conditions),⁴⁶ as follows:

| <i>Years</i> | <i>Pregnancy care services</i> | <i>Family planning services</i> |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2019 | 204 482 | 403 565 |
| 2020 | 177 326 | 426 823 |
| 2021 | 156 560 | 203 719 |
| 2022 | 154 025 | 207 448 |
| 2023 (first half) | 82 207 | 165 305 |

⁴⁶ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 40 (e).

86. The Ministry of Health, in coordination with relevant sectors, has carried out awareness campaigns on breast cancer, including the importance of early detection and screening. Many public service announcements about breast cancer and avoiding risk factors have been disseminated through various media outlets and on social media, which have contributed to increased and enhanced public awareness of the importance of this topic. Health centres also hold numerous health education sessions on various topics such as safe maternity; natural childbirth; sound post-partum practices such as family planning (methods and benefits); breast health and the importance of breast self-examination; early detection of cervical cancer; the importance of pap smears; sexually transmitted diseases; premarital medical care; the risks of early pregnancy and consanguineous marriage; and symptoms and prevention of COVID-19. The table below sets out the number of women who received examinations during the Ministry's campaign:

| <i>Year</i> | <i>2019</i> | <i>2020</i> | <i>2021</i> | <i>2022</i> |
|---|-------------|---|-------------|-------------|
| Number of women examined (breast screening) | 428 892 | Campaign not implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic | 245 621 | 417 121 |

87. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour has made efforts to promote engagement from health-related NGOs by facilitating their access to cooperation programmes with international organizations and providing them with the necessary support. There are now 64 health-related NGOs across all governorates that provide a range of medical and health services related to improving health outcomes; primary care; reproductive health services; prevention programmes; emergency treatment; and services for mental and psychological conditions and trauma. Services are provided to pregnant women free of charge.

88. The table below sets out the percentage of births that took place in a health facility, by age and area.

| <i>Percentage of births that took place in a health facility, by age and area</i> | | |
|---|-------------|-------------------|
| <i>Age group</i> | <i>Area</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
| 15–19 | Urban | 91.87 |
| | Rural | 83.55 |
| 20–24 | Urban | 96.18 |
| | Rural | 91.61 |
| 25–29 | Urban | 94.13 |
| | Rural | 90.49 |
| 30–34 | Urban | 92.66 |
| | Rural | 92.17 |
| 35–39 | Urban | 91.72 |
| | Rural | 91.83 |
| 40–44 | Urban | 94.66 |
| | Rural | 83.05 |
| 45–49 | Urban | 94.33 |
| | Rural | 87.56 |

89. Regarding the implementation of the National AIDS Programme, regulations and laws relating to people living with HIV are based on laws that date back to 2007–2008. The country is committed to global targets. The national HIV plan for the period 2020–2024 and sexually transmitted disease monitoring systems have registered

progress towards those targets: 95 per cent of pregnant women are screened for syphilis and 90 per cent for HIV with free, prior and informed consent, and 95 per cent of infected pregnant women receive effective treatment. Furthermore, 70 per cent of key populations have access to a full range of services for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, including supply of condoms.

90. Female patients as a percentage of all beneficiaries, male and female, of mental health treatment:

| 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 ⁴⁷ |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|------|--------------------|
| 512 | 425 | 747 | 501 | 602 | 565 | 5 204 | 536 | 53.2 |

Article 13: Economic and social life⁴⁸

91. The Government has taken no decisions on the economy that discriminate on the basis of gender. Such decisions cover all segments of society without discrimination. The objectives of the National Development Programme for Post-War Syria 2030 are to achieve food security, combat poverty and establish an integrated social protection system. Monetary and financial policies are focused on strengthening financial access and improving banking and insurance services. In addition, employment and labour market policies contain an emphasis on regulation, the development of incentives to regulate informal labour, the development of business incubators and the promotion of entrepreneurial skills and skilled labour, especially among the unemployed, in line with labour market needs.

92. The National Development Programme includes programmes designed to combat multidimensional poverty. It is aimed at reducing the incidence and severity of poverty in all Syrian regions; achieving social justice and equality; investing in human capabilities; meeting the population's basic needs for food, electricity and housing; providing equitable opportunities in the areas of health, education and living standards; and reducing urban poverty.

93. The Integrated Rural Development Programme is aimed at achieving genuine, comprehensive and balanced rural development in the areas of, inter alia, health, education and services. This is done by raising the level of rural development and quality of life by providing economic support to those living in rural areas, providing for their basic needs, addressing the challenges faced by rural areas and the suburbs of major cities through reduction in unemployment and poverty and achieving social justice between rural and urban areas.⁴⁹

94. The National Development Programme for Post-War Syria 2030 also includes key goals related to improving the status of women and empowering them economically, politically and legally. It contains a call for a rights-based approach to development to empower women, eliminate all forms of discrimination against them, reduce gender disparities, involve women in decision-making, eliminate all forms of violence against women and combat unemployment among women.⁵⁰

95. The law does not discriminate between women and men when it comes to the economy, politics or other spheres. Women have the right by law to create businesses and obtain bank loans and mortgages without needing their husband's approval. Many businesses have been founded by women, and there are organizations and banks that

⁴⁷ As at the end of September 2022.

⁴⁸ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 42.

⁴⁹ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 43.

⁵⁰ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 42 (b).

support and encourage such businesses. In addition, girls are free to participate in all aspects of cultural life, as Syrian law does not discriminate between men and women.

Article 14: Rural women

96. The Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, through the former Directorate of Rural Women's Development and the current Directorate of Rural, Agricultural and Family Development, attaches great importance to rural families in general and rural women in particular, which is clearly reflected in its functions:⁵¹

- Developing annual plans and programmes relating to rural and agricultural development and monitoring and evaluating their implementation.
- Conducting studies and developing the necessary strategies and programmes for rural families in general and rural women in particular.
- Adopting a participatory approach to local community organizing by involving them in the planning, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of rural development projects.
- Funding rural family businesses and rural women's businesses through financial and other services and by establishing vehicles for the funding, on favourable terms, of rural women's businesses, in cooperation with the concerned authorities.
- Creating a development map to link rural products with markets, identify areas in need of assistance and grants, and implement them at the family level with assistance from various parties.
- Organizing national and international fairs and marketing events and working with other entities to hold similar activities.
- Establishing a framework for and regulating the relationship between rural families and rural women producers on the one hand and production units, markets, and packing and storage centres on the other, in the public, private, and joint sectors.

97. The roles played by rural women in productive agricultural work throughout the Syrian countryside are numerous and varied; accordingly, they are an essential element in rural development processes in general and in agriculture in particular. Rural women participate in productive farming and husbandry, in the manufacture of food from agricultural products and in traditional textile and craft industries. They also play a social role in community-level activities, initiatives, efforts and contributions, including volunteering and membership in social institutions, formal and informal organizations and charitable associations. That is in addition to their importance in reproduction, family life, child rearing and reproductive health issues.

98. The Directorate of Rural Women's Development at the Ministry of Agriculture, in order to highlight women's productive role and contribution to crop and livestock labour, conducted a field survey of 7,500 families throughout the Syrian countryside and determined the rates of involvement by women and men in agriculture. The survey covered 63 crops, husbandry (cattle, sheep, goats and poultry) and beekeeping. According to the survey, the gender division of labour clearly shows that women contribute to all agricultural activities. Women carry out 70 per cent of manual processes, picking and sorting and nearly 50 per cent of manual harvesting, packing and packaging. As for the gender division of labour in animal husbandry, women contribute at least 50 per cent of all labour in some jobs and 100 per cent in others, such as poultry and silkworm farming.

⁵¹ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 44.

99. The Ministry of Agriculture has taken measures to involve women in the formulation and implementation of development plans at all levels. It has adopted a participatory approach to local community organizing through the formation of local development committees, in which rural women are an essential and constructive element. Women's participation in those committees ranges from 25 to 50 per cent. To encourage their participation, the Ministry provides all types of training and education, including literacy programmes, in order to increase their efficiency. The Rural Development Directorate at the Ministry also offers training to rural women to raise their productivity, improve their social and health awareness and to involve them in agricultural labour. As part of the effort to help rural women to create small income-generating enterprises, they have been trained in entrepreneurship. The courses have covered the creation of private businesses, how to determine the economic feasibility of a business, the manufacture of agricultural products and marketing skills to ensure that rural products are competitive. The following are figures relating to some of the training courses:

- 7,700 women farmers have taken 547 training courses on various technical agricultural topics and food processing.
- 465,280 rural women have participated in 60,647 awareness-raising seminars on various agricultural, social, cultural, legal, environmental and health topics.
- 29,050 practical training courses, targeting 225,248 rural women, have been held to develop skills related to the food, handicraft and agricultural industries.
- 116,000 field visits have been made to 490,780 rural women farmers working with various agricultural crops (including cotton, beets, fruit trees and livestock).
- 225 training courses have been held for 5,500 women agricultural engineers on rural women's development.

100. The Directorate of Rural, Agricultural and Family Development has carried out many development projects directed at rural families, and rural women in particular.⁵² These projects relied primarily on community partnership between the local community and the Ministry of Agriculture through community organizing and the formation of local development committees, of which rural women are an essential and effective part. Women make up between 25 and 50 per cent of these committees, depending on the nature of the committee's work. Women participate in the planning, implementation and evaluation of all development projects. The most significant projects implemented by the Directorate are as follows:

- The National Family Farming Programme. The Programme, to which the State allocated 5.8 billion Syrian pounds, is aimed at contributing to rural development, in particular in the poorest villages; empowering rural families economically and increasing their income; and increasing their food self-sufficiency and improving their nutrition. The project has benefited 571,110 people in 11 governorates.
- Home-based food processing project for rural women (microcredit). The Government has provided 1 billion Syrian pounds in funding for this project, which is aimed at transforming surplus family agriculture products into value-added home industries to alleviate poverty among rural families, secure additional sources of income, increase family income and enable access to financing on favourable terms by women in areas that are not served by other parties or financing programmes. The project provides several services, including loans and financing packages for rural women (assistance in purchasing supplies, launching businesses and connecting women to rural

⁵² See the Committee's recommendations in para. 44 (b).

women's markets in each governorate and to similar markets). It also provides training services related to business formation, maintenance of business records and budget management.

- A project for specialized food processing units (collective projects at the village level). The Government and some NGOs have provided 490 million Syrian pounds for this project, which involves the creation and equipping of a food manufacturing unit that serves as an incubator for a collective project benefiting all women in the village and all farming families in the region. The site, supplies, equipment, machinery and operating capital are secured. The unit operates year-round, in all agricultural seasons, and has a daily operating capacity of 1 ton of fruit, vegetables or milk. The project is aimed at adding value to agricultural products harvested in the abundant season through processing. This provides employment opportunities for women working directly at the unit and benefits all women in the village whose products are processed in exchange for remuneration. There are 33 units, in the following locations: Rif Dimashq (6), Dar'a (3), Suwayda' (2), Qunaytirah (1), Homs (5), Hama (6), Ghab (2), Ladhiqiyah (4), Tartus (2) and Aleppo (2). The collective processing units have directly benefited 480 women. In addition, 450 individual home processing units, benefiting 450 rural women, were provided across all governorates. These units comprise equipment and machinery for the home processing of rural products. Training was also provided on the processing of dairy products, vegetables and fruits.
- Women's Empowerment and Poverty Reduction Project. The purpose of this project is to encourage rural women to establish small income-generating productive businesses and to provide relevant training. Women are also trained on the management of these businesses and on using the revenue to improve the living conditions of rural families. The project enables rural women in areas that are not served by the financing services and programmes of other parties to access financing on favourable terms. It funds the following areas: livestock production, agricultural production, food processing, service activities and handicrafts. It also aims to empower rural women economically as a means of social advancement and to harness their potential so that it can have a positive impact on families in particular and society as a whole. The project, which was funded by Government loans in the amount of 729,603,850 Syrian pounds, benefited 19,828 women in 449 villages across 13 governorates. A study of the project's economic and social impact, using comprehensive field research, measured 25 economic and social indicators and arrived at scholarly and practical recommendations and findings, most notably the following:
 - 97 per cent of households increased their income after starting a business.
 - 93 per cent of households improved the quality of their food.
 - 51 per cent of households improved their housing conditions.
 - 81 per cent of households improved the quality of their clothing.
 - 59.5 per cent of households improved family health.
 - 35 per cent of women business owners now own their own property.

101. The Directorate of Rural Development, in order to help rural women to access markets for their goods and to assist them in bringing their products from the farm to the market in a manner consistent with Syrian food quality and safety standards, has established spaces where rural women's products may be sold. Government funding in the amount of 536 million Syrian pounds was allocated for this purpose. Markets for the sale of rural women's goods were launched in Ladhiqiyah in 2017 through the

“environmental restaurant” project. In 2019, these markets were expanded to the governorates of Rif Dimashq, Hama, Aleppo, Homs and Qunaytirah. In 2020, prefabricated markets were opened in the governorates of Ladhqiyyah, Dar’a, Homs, Aleppo and Hama. In 2021, the Damascus Governorate market, the Hama Governorate market, the Aleppo Governorate market and the Qunaytirah Governorate market were opened. There are now 16 market spaces, located in the governorates of Ladhqiyyah (4), Damascus (1), Homs (4), Aleppo (2), Hama (2, one of which is in the process of being set up), Dar’a (1), Qunaytirah (1), Rif Dimashq (1, in the process of being set up), at which goods from 6,921 businesses run by rural women are sold.

102. Between 2016 and 2022, productive grants were provided in cooperation with international organizations operating in Syria. The grants targeted poor women and women heads of households in rural areas and provides production supplies (agricultural supplies, vegetables, poultry, crops) with the aim of promoting self-sufficiency and household food security. The grants were provided through cooperation between the Ministry of Agriculture, international organizations (including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme), the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and local NGOs and were awarded to 342,191 women.

103. The Ministry of Agriculture has concluded special agreements with the Agricultural Cooperative Bank regarding access to agricultural credits and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment when it comes to land reform, agrarian reform and rural settlement projects. These are aimed at facilitating rural women’s access, through personal guarantees and low interest rates, to the financing they need to start their own businesses, with the aim of empowering rural women economically. A total of 19,828 rural women received 729,603,850 Syrian pounds in government funding through the Women’s Empowerment and Poverty Alleviation Project. Loans were provided to 1,000 rural women so that they could start income-generating small businesses for household agricultural processing, learn how to manage such businesses and generate income to improve the standard of living of their households. The loans were issued at very low interest rates in exchange for personal guarantees through a special agreement with the Agricultural Bank.

104. A national programme was developed to register rural women’s home businesses and microenterprises. The programme is aimed at creating a database of the number, type and distribution of such enterprises in Syrian rural areas, which will facilitate accurate and coherent future planning. A guide is available with the names, locations, products, activities and addresses of the business owners, and women entrepreneurs who register their businesses may take advantage of benefits offered by the Ministry such as training programmes, loans, grants and participation in governorate-wide exhibitions or trade fairs for rural women’s products. The table below sets out the number of registered businesses, by governorate:

| <i>Governorate</i> | <i>Number of collective businesses</i> | <i>Number of individual businesses</i> |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Tartus | 8 | 35 |
| Dayr al-Zawr | 1 | 14 |
| Ladhqiyyah | 31 | 41 |
| Aleppo | 5 | 18 |
| Idlib | 1 | 20 |
| Dar’a | 7 | 107 |
| Hama | 22 | 150 |
| Suwayda’ | 13 | 93 |

| <i>Governorate</i> | <i>Number of collective businesses</i> | <i>Number of individual businesses</i> |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Qunaytirah | 6 | 21 |
| Ghab | 8 | 200 |
| Rif Dimashq | 29 | 45 |
| Raqqah | 1 | 40 |
| Hasakah | 2 | 31 |
| Homs | 28 | 70 |
| Total | 162 | 885 |

105. The Syrian Commission has undertaken cooperation with Ministry of Agriculture in the form of the Directorate of Rural, Agricultural and Family Development, a model of cooperation between government agencies. The Directorate has done the following:

- Provided loans for 236 families in Hasakah, Raqqah, Dayr al-Zawr, Ladhikiyah, Tartus, Aleppo and Suwayda' Governorates.
- Assisted 535 families of killed or wounded persons in Suwayda', Rif Dimashq, Ladhikiyah, Tartus and Homs Governorates through production grants for the raising of sheep, goats, bees and poultry.
- Held 157 specialized technical training courses for recipients of production loans and grants, benefiting 3,060 families in Rif Dimashq, Suwayda', Homs, Ladhikiyah and Tartus Governorates.
- Offered 147 awareness-raising seminars to 1,600 individuals on public health, reproductive health and family planning.
- Issued 45 bulletins on food processing, first aid and manual skills, targeting 500 individuals, to revitalize food, handicraft and agricultural industries.
- Provided grants for sheep fodder and groceries, at 250,000 Syrian pounds per grant, for women in rural northern Ladhikiyah Governorate.
- Provided grants of summer and winter vegetable seeds and field supplies to 1,500 beneficiaries in Rif Dimashq and Ladhikiyah Governorates to help families improve their nutrition and help them remain in their villages.

106. Annual exhibitions are held in Damascus for the marketing and promotion of the products of rural women entrepreneurs. The following exhibitions were held:

- The Rural Women Development Partners Exhibition, held in 2017 at Jala' Sports City, with 200 women farmers participating.
- "Together for a business in every rural home" exhibition. Held in 2018 in Tishrin Park in central Damascus, with 300 women farmers participating.
- The Rifiyah Exhibition, held in 2018 in Tishreen Park, with the participation of 212 individuals and 23 manufacturing units, for the launch of the Rifiyah brand.
- The month-long Ayilah Market Exhibition, held in August 2021, for the promotion and sale of rural families' products and food processing unit products, in which 250 rural women took part.
- The Syria: History and Civilizations festival, held at the Dummar Central Incubator for Traditional Arts from 17 to 31 March 2022, which featured products such as preserves, dehydrated vegetables, dried fruits, rural handicrafts and dairy products. One hundred rural women participated.

- Flower Show, featuring various traditional crafts (basketry, pottery, leather, rugs and ceramics), held in 2022 and 2023.
- The Food Expo food industries and packaging exhibition, which featured products made from apples, figs, grapes, honey, walnuts and olives, held on the grounds of Exhibition City in Damascus in 2021, 2022 and 2023.

107. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, through the Women's Support and Empowerment Centres, holds community dialogues on the law with the participation of experts to raise awareness of Syrian law and its amendments in various fields. The Labour Act (No. 17 of 2010) contains provisions regulating women's employment, including legal protection for women. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour seeks to empower women economically and socially, providing them with loans for the creation of microenterprises through the Rural Women's Support and Empowerment Programme and its rural industry units, which are located throughout all governorates. The Ministry conducts many training programmes and activities to empower rural women and aims to provide a package of services (social, cultural, health, agricultural and empowerment).

108. Decision No. 482 (2017) of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, containing the Women's Employment Act, was adopted pursuant to articles 120 and 125 of Act No. 17 (2010). It specifies the jobs, circumstances and situations in which women may be hired to work night shifts. It specifies jobs that are harmful to women's health or morals and other work in which women may not be employed. An employer with five or more women employees is required to post a copy of the Women's Employment Act in a prominent area of the workplace or in a place where women employees gather.

109. Services offered by community development centres are developed by NGOs in cooperation with international organizations and are part of the social protection system. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour has begun to expand its services geographically through community centres and has developed a guide that classifies the centres according to specific type of service, with a view to promoting diverse social development. This required the creation of an interactive map showing the geographical distribution of services by type. There are around 486 community centres: UNICEF (158), UNFPA (189) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (121). Below are some of the main services benefiting women directly or through their families:

- Awareness-raising programmes to counter gender-based violence through women's committees; case management; health and medical care; clinical care for survivors of gender-based violence; specialized, primary and recreational psychosocial support; individual and group counselling; legal services; vocational training; livelihood support and economic empowerment activities; and awareness-raising sessions.
- Basic services for people with specific needs (in-kind assistance, social and recreational activities, psychosocial support and awareness-raising sessions).
- Livelihood services for people with specific needs (vocational training, production units, livelihood support).
- Community-based initiatives (community committees, focused discussion groups on child protection, case management, psychosocial support, capacity-building, education on the risk of explosives and awareness-raising sessions).
- The My Paths programme was launched for 2022 in cooperation with UNICEF and the Institut Européen de Coopération et de Développement in six governorates (Rif Dimashq, Homs, Hama, Aleppo, Aleppo, Suwayda' and Tartus), which

included the opening of six training centres for young people in the fields of English language, life skills, vocational training and computers, benefiting 6,000 individuals.

4. Articles 15 and 16

Article 15: Equality before the law

110. According to article 50 of the Constitution, the rule of law is the basis of governance in the State. Article 33 states that citizenship is a fundamental principle that entails rights and duties enjoyed by every citizen and exercised according to law. Citizens are equal in rights and duties, without discrimination on the basis of sex, origin, language, religion or belief. The State guarantees the principle of equality of opportunity among citizens, which applies to all areas, especially equality in law and equality before the law. The laws, including civil, criminal and administrative law, general election law, party law and contract law, are formulated in a general and abstract manner without any discriminatory elements. Women enjoy full legal capacity in civil law. They have the legal right to conclude contracts and to own and dispose of property. They may bear a name and surname different than that of their husband, and the law recognizes their independent financial status. Under the Commercial Code and the Companies Act, they have the right to engage in all types of commercial activities. Women have an equal right to apply for public employment if they meet the conditions, academic qualifications and practical experience required by the job and the law. These conditions are general and abstract, granting all persons equal opportunity to apply for such positions. The law also provides for equality with respect to wages, bonuses and promotions, to achieve justice and equality for all.

111. The Constitution guarantees equality before the law in education, without discrimination. Educational policy in Syria is based on constitutional principles, which provide for mandatory primary education. These principles are applied to the letter through the laws on basic, secondary and university education, which include the following provisions:

- Full equality in admission requirements throughout all levels of education.
- Full equality in teaching, examinations, degrees, grants, awards and privileges.
- Full equality in access to research tools, libraries and laboratories.
- Full equality in the selection of faculty members for promotion, awards and privileges.

112. Syrian laws, in line with the provisions of the Constitution, enshrine the principle of equality before the courts. The Constitution affirms that the right of litigation and the right of appeal, review and defence before the courts are protected by law. All citizens, male and female, have the right to exercise the right to litigation on an equal footing before the courts, without discrimination or distinction between them, and are guaranteed the right of appeal, review and defence before the judiciary. Article 53 of the Constitution prohibits the immunization of any administrative act or decision from judicial review. Any person who has been sentenced by a final ruling and whose sentence has been enforced will have the right, if the ruling is proved to have been unjustified, to demand compensation from the State for the harm incurred. The State guarantees legal assistance, without discrimination, to persons who are unable to afford it, in accordance with the law. Accordingly, the Legal Aid Act was amended by Act No. 29 (2013) to exempt litigants from fees or insurance charges should they be materially unable to pay them. Women accounted for 35 per cent of all beneficiaries of legal aid in the period 2014–2023.

113. There are no restrictions on women's travel.⁵³ Syrian laws grant unmarried women full freedom to travel and move inside and outside the country without having to obtain consent from anyone, unless they are minors under 18 years of age, in which case they require the consent of their guardian. Married women have the right to move and travel alone inside and outside the country without the husband's consent. Married women are allowed to travel outside the country with their children after obtaining the father's consent or, in cases where the father is travelling or absent, pursuant to legal guardianship, awarded at the discretion of a sharia judge, authorizing her to travel with the children. The same applies to fathers who wish to travel with their children; the consent of the mother is required, according to the most recent amendment to article 50 of the Personal Status Act (No. 4 of 2019).

114. In the light of the situation in the country since 2011, Syrian sharia courts have had to grant temporary guardianship to mothers in cases where fathers are absent, which allows mothers to travel and move with their children inside and outside the country without the approval of their male guardians. Sharia courts have granted thousands of temporary guardianships to Syrian mothers over their children in their husbands' absence.

Article 16: Equality in marriage and family relations

115. The Constitution recognizes the family as the nucleus of society, and the law protects the family as a unit and strengthens its bonds. The Constitution stipulates that the State must protect and encourage marriage and work to remove material and social obstacles that hinder it. The State must also protect motherhood and childhood, take care of children and young people and provide them with appropriate conditions for the development of their talents. Every person has the right to marry and choose a spouse. The Personal Status Act regulates marriage, divorce, kinship, custody, wills and inheritance.

116. On the basis of a comprehensive review of the Personal Status Act, two amendments to the Act were issued, the first through Act No. 4 (2019) and the second through Act No. 20 (2019), both of which are aimed at protecting women and guaranteeing their rights. About 75 articles were amended with a view to removing discriminatory provisions and ensuring equality between men and women. They covered marriage age and provisions on divorce, custody and guardianship. The provision concerning mandatory bequests was expanded in addition to other provisions concerning dowries, alimony and inheritance. Women were also given the right to impose restrictions on the marriage contract in order to guarantee their rights.

117. Article 1 of the Act stipulates that marriage is a contract between a man and a woman, both of whom must be legally eligible to marry, drawn up with the aim of binding them together for the purpose of sharing their lives and producing children. Article 5 provides that the marriage contract must be presented by one of the contractors and accepted by the other. Act No. 20 (2019) amended the marriage to make it the same for both males and females by stipulating that the age of consent for marriage is 18 years for both males and females.⁵⁴

118. A wife, in line with her rights in marriage, has the right to set her desired conditions in the marriage contract. Article 14, paragraph 1 of Act No. 4 (2019) states that either the husband or wife may include his or her own conditions in the marriage contract, provided that they do not violate the sharia or the law. In other words, a woman has the right to include certain stipulations in the marriage contract, such as the freedom to travel without her husband's permission, the right to initiate divorce,

⁵³ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 46 (b).

⁵⁴ See the Committee's recommendations in para. 46 (a).

the right to work outside the home or the right for her husband not to bring a second wife to live in the house in which she resides. Article 14, paragraph 4, adds that an injured spouse has the right to request the dissolution of the marriage contract if valid conditions therein are violated. In order to encourage marriage, fees are not charged for transactions related to marriage, administrative or legal documentation of the marriage or the collection of the dowry.

119. Article 117 stipulates a woman's right to compensation in the event that she is subjected to arbitrary divorce. In other words, if a man divorces his wife of his own will, without a reasonable justification and not at her request, she is entitled to compensation from the husband, in line with his financial circumstances and not exceeding three years' alimony for similar cases. That is over and above her right to maintenance during the *iddah* period. The judge may rule that the compensation be paid as a lump sum or in instalments, depending on the circumstances.

120. The amendment to article 257 on wills allows one third of an estate to be shared equally between the children of a daughter and the children of a son, a right that children of a daughter did not previously have.

C. Challenges

121. The Syrian Arab Republic faces multifaceted international, political, economic, humanitarian and legal challenges. Since 2011, it has faced a systematic terrorist war and the illegal presence of foreign forces on its territory, which has had catastrophic repercussions for human rights in general and women's rights in particular. The war and the fight against terrorism remain at the forefront of the country's challenges, in addition to foreign support for armed terrorist groups, an inability to control the borders, especially with Turkey, and the illegal presence of forces of the United States and its proxies, including armed separatist groups, in north-eastern Syria. All of this has exhausted the State's capabilities and resources, stymied economic development, hindered the implementation of development programmes, caused heavy material losses in all sectors and affected women's social safety nets.

122. The continued imposition of unilateral coercive measures on the Syrian people by countries hostile to Syria is one of the most difficult challenges. These measures have had disastrous effects, particularly under the so-called Caesar Act, which extends sanctions to States and individuals that have dealings with the Syrian State. This has curtailed the courses of action available to the State and blocked the funding needed for national plans in all sectors, especially those relating to the provision of the basic necessities for a decent life. These measures have constituted a suffocating blockade that has targeted Syrian citizens and increased their suffering, in particular of Syrian women.

123. Part of Syrian territory is under the control of armed terrorist groups backed by several countries. Kurdish separatist groups backed by the United States are exploiting it to deplete and steal Syria's economic resources and natural wealth and are committing aggression against Syrian citizens in those areas.

124. The Israeli occupation continues its aggressive practices and its imposition of harsh economic and social conditions on Syrian citizens in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan, and certain States in the Security Council protect it and encourage it to persist with its violations. In addition, its repeated attacks on Syrian territory have increased in intensity and impact since 2020 and have targeted populated areas, civilian airports and infrastructure, in flagrant defiance of international law and international legitimacy.

125. The illegal presence of foreign forces on Syrian territory and their repeated attacks on Syrian citizens in those areas, their systematic destruction of public and private property, environmental damage and their theft of national natural resources and wealth (oil, gas, water, wheat and antiquities) has led to privation among the Syrian people, especially women and children, and increased their suffering.

126. The earthquake that struck Syria on 6 February 2023 exacerbated the suffering of Syrian women and was a huge blow to women's rights in all areas. Despite the efforts of the Syrian State, the scale of needs in the aftermath of the earthquake remains immense more than one year after the disaster, especially the needs for alternative housing, livelihoods, health, education, basic family necessities and humanitarian relief, which means that more support at the international and local levels is required.

127. Humanitarian work in Syria has been politicized due to pressure from donor countries, a lack of international funding, especially for humanitarian response plans, and discrimination in the distribution of international aid in Syria.

128. One of the most important challenges facing the Syrian State and, in particular, Syrian citizens in countries of asylum, is the creation of conducive conditions for the return and resettlement of displaced citizens. Under Decree No. 46 (2018), the State formed a coordinating body for the return of displaced Syrians. It is tasked with ensuring, through coordination with local, Arab and foreign stakeholders, appropriate conditions to facilitate the return of displaced persons to the homeland and it strives to provide decent livelihoods within available resources. Stronger support from the international community for humanitarian and early recovery programmes is needed to address the physical, economic and social obstacles that prevent return.

129. In conclusion, the Syrian Arab Republic affirms its respect for its international obligations to protect and guarantee human rights on the ground. It affirms its commitment to international and regional instruments, in particular the Convention, that are aimed at promoting and fulfilling women's rights. It strives, within its available resources, to ensure that Syrian women enjoy their fundamental rights as guaranteed by the Constitution and national laws, because it believes that women play a pivotal role in the advancement of society. Syria is open to serious cooperation and constructive dialogue with the Committee in the framework of the mandate assigned thereto in the Convention.
