



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

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

**Replies of Oman to the list of issues and questions in
relation to its fourth periodic report***

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



The Sultanate of Oman hereby submits its responses to the list of issues and questions received from the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in March 2023, point by point.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

1. With regard to participation by women in the preparation of Oman Vision 2040, Omani women have played a vital role in drafting and implementing the vision in its various stages. There have been some 41,000 participants with participation rates ranging between 30 and 35 per cent. That reflects their strong commitment to achieving progress and development in the country. The stages have included the preparation and diagnosis stage, the supervision and scenario stage, the directives and targets stage, the communication initiatives stage, the Oman-wide tour, and, lastly, the national conference stage.

2. Women participated in preparation of the tenth five-year plan at an overall average of 30 per cent. The percentage of women in the central working group involved in preparation of the plan was 60 per cent. They took part in workshops, technical and coordinating meetings, and virtual meetings. They contributed to setting the plan's priorities. Their percentages of participation in drafting the various priorities were as follows: welfare and social protection, 51 per cent; governance of the State's administrative apparatus and human resources, 59 per cent; development of the youth sector, 37 per cent; and environment and natural resources, 36 per cent. In paragraph 9 of our fourth periodic report, we indicate that the aim of establishing the Unit to Monitor Implementation of Oman Vision 2040, which has an office in every government unit, is to follow up implementation of the objectives set out in the Vision, analyse outcomes, monitor the performance indicators of the entities entrusted with achieving them, and follow up implementation of policies to simplify procedures and take measures to facilitate services.

3. With regard to the midterm assessment of the tenth five-year plan, it should be noted that the procedures for forming the assessment working group will be initiated in June 2023, which is after the date of submission of these responses. It will be possible to review the details of the assessment at our forthcoming dialogue with the Committee.

4. In implementation of the national strategic urban development plans in line with Oman Vision 2040, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, at a Cabinet meeting, issued a directive to create a national women's and children's health centre in Sultan Haitham City. That city was dedicated on 31 May 2023 as a new model for building smart sustainable cities that keep pace with modern life and the aspirations of young people in the Sultanate of Oman.

Women's rights and gender equality in relation to the pandemic, recovery efforts and global crises

5. With regard to efforts made and mechanisms established to respond to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and its long-term impact on ways to address crises, the Sultanate of Oman reiterates what it stated in paragraphs 14–18 of its fourth periodic report. A national emergency committee was formed by Royal Decree No. 32/88. It is chaired by the Inspector General of Police and Customs and includes in its membership a number of the relevant bodies, such as the National Centre for Emergency Management created by Ministerial Decision No. 98/2023 (see annex I), the monitoring and early warning centres and main support bodies, the emergency case management committees in the governorates and the emergency management committees in the districts. The National Emergency Committee serves as the umbrella for all national human and material resources and capacities needed

to deal with emergency events. Those events include weather situations, cyclones, earthquakes, landslides, floods, dam failures, tsunamis, hazardous materials accidents (chemical, radiological, biological), major transport accidents (air, sea and land), multiple injury incidents, major fires, oil spills, environmental pollution, epidemics, any threats to water or food systems, wars and armed conflicts, as well as any other public safety hazards or incidents requiring a national response.

6. With regard to the strategies in place to ensure gender equality during the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery, the Sultanate of Oman put in place a package of measures to confront the pandemic. Those measures included free vaccination for citizens and residents of both sexes, remote work mechanisms with due attention paid to pregnant women, incentives and facilities for owners of small and medium enterprises to mitigate the effects of the pandemic during this exceptional period, and e-learning initiatives for both sexes that ensure that women are treated equally with men.

7. With regard to measures taken to ensure the equal participation of women in these processes, the State has encouraged women to participate in the provision of services and support at the institutional level and in the field. It encourages them to volunteer in cooperation with the relief and shelter sector, and to do their part in the medical response sector in partnership with civil society institutions. In all of the country's districts, women play a major role in providing support and raising awareness in society. They are active in environmental protection, pollution control, environmental planning, pollutant monitoring, environmental assessment studies, and environmental inspection and control programmes. They also take part in devising global environmental indicators and following up on regional and international environmental agreements.

Legislative framework and definition of discrimination against women

8. In response to the Committee's recommendation in paragraph 12 of its concluding observations that Oman adopt a comprehensive definition of discrimination against women, the Sultanate of Oman affirms that the relevant authorities are conducting a comprehensive review of legislation to bring it into line with articles 96 and 97 of the Basic Statute of the State, which is the supreme law promulgated by Royal Decree No. 6/2021.

9. Moreover, according to article 3 of the Interpretations and General Provisions Act issued by Royal Decree No. 3/74 concerning equality, words indicating or referring to the masculine gender are to be understood as also including the feminine, just as pronouns that are manifestly or implicitly masculine are likewise to be understood to include the feminine. That means that all provisions of national laws follow the principle of gender equality and non-discrimination, in line with international obligations regarding legislation to define and fight discrimination in all its forms.

10. Further to what we stated in our fourth periodic report about steps taken to eliminate discriminatory provisions in national legislation, and with regard to the Committee's recommendations in paragraphs 11 and 12 of the concluding observations, all the provisions of the Penal Code, the Mediation and Conciliation Act and the Social Security Act are devoid of any provisions that discriminate against women. They treat all persons equally. We note that the relevant parties are currently conducting a comprehensive review of all laws to ensure that they are in line with the Basic Statute of the State and the provisions of the Convention.

11. As we stated in paragraph 20 of the fourth periodic report, the provisions of national laws are applicable to all without discrimination. Article 18 of the Basic Statute of the State provides that life and dignity are the right of every human being

and the State is committed to respecting and protecting them in accordance with the law. Articles 22–38 provide for the right to a safe life, the right to fair litigation, the right not to be tortured, the right not to be arrested or searched without judicial warrant, the right to appoint a lawyer and for them to be informed of the charge, the right to the sanctity of private life, the right to freedom of opinion, the right to freedom of expression, the right to freedom of religious practice, the right to sanctity of the body and the right to sanctity of the home. These rights are applicable generally to citizens and others. Article 42 provides that every resident or person present legally in the Sultanate shall enjoy the protection of their person and property in accordance with the law. They must comply with legislation and laws in force, respect the values of society and honour its traditions and principles.

12. The State reiterates what was stated in paragraph 22 of the fourth periodic report about all laws guaranteeing the principle of equality between women and men as a fundamental basis of legislation in the Sultanate of Oman, in accordance with article 15 of the Basic Statute of the State (6/2021).

Access to justice

13. The Sultanate of Oman has paid great attention to the intellectual formation of members of the judiciary, including judges, prosecutors and law students. It builds their capacities in the field of human rights in general starting with their enrolment in higher education and the Higher Judicial Institute through both academic curricula and practical training courses.

14. Further to paragraph 29 of the fourth periodic report, the Sultanate of Oman continues to implement the existing programme of cooperation between the Ministry of Social Development and the Higher Judicial Institute to provide training on the principles of human rights conventions (women, children, persons with disabilities) for judicial personnel and partner agencies dealing with human rights issues. During the 2022–2023 period, four training courses were held as part of that cooperation programme, with some 160 participants.

15. The Sultanate of Oman affirms that women work in the judiciary under the same conditions as men. That applies to wages, promotions and career trajectory. In total, there were 53 female legal staff in the Office of the Public Prosecutor as of the middle of 2023 (see annex II). There were 679 women working at the Council of Administrative Affairs as of 2023.

16. Further to paragraph 24 of the fourth periodic report, and with a view to raising women’s awareness of these new laws and mechanisms, all the relevant institutions the Sultanate of Oman, in cooperation with the regional offices of international organizations, are committed to continuing programmes to raise legal awareness among the various components of society in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, including young people of both sexes. There have already been four dialogue sessions. That is in addition to making use of social media by disseminating four podcasts and three awareness films during the 2022–2023 period. The Oman Human Rights Commission also periodically holds awareness campaigns for academic, legal and military institutions in all the governorates.

17. With regard to steps taken by the Oman Human Rights Commission in the light of the 2020 study done in Muscat that concluded that women have a “moderate degree of awareness of national laws and mechanisms to protect them from abuse”, the Commission has taken several measures. It is working to enhance women’s legal awareness by setting forth a long-term action plan to organize a national campaign targeting women in various governorates of the Sultanate, in cooperation with government agencies and civil society institutions.

18. As part of its national functions, the Ministry of Labour provides legal publications in several languages for all workers coming from outside the Sultanate of Oman. They are available on the Ministry's website. It conducts awareness lectures for women workers in the private sector to make them aware of the most important rights provided for in the Labour Code and ministerial regulations and decisions. It receives complaints from women workers in the private sector, who may appoint a lawyer to attend labour dispute settlement hearings.

19. As noted in paragraph 27 of the fourth periodic report, articles 28 and 30 of the Basic Statute of the Sultanate guarantee the right to litigation and the right of defence as inherent constitutional rights. Article 49 of the Code of Criminal Procedure guarantees the right of the accused to communicate with and retain an attorney. Article 74 provides that accused persons, victims, civil plaintiffs, persons responsible for them and persons defending them shall have the right to attend preliminary investigation proceedings. Anyone accused of a felony may be accompanied by an attorney to defend them.

20. The regulation on legal aid for indigent persons guarantees such persons an attorney. That is one of the types of legal assistance provided for in article 1 of that regulation. Judicial practice in the Sultanate requires that an attorney be present in capital cases.

21. The Sultanate of Oman affirms the right of all to legal assistance and litigation services without discrimination, in accordance with the provisions of the Basic Statute of the State and national legislation. In implementation of the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 with regard to making use of technologies of the future, the Office of the Public Prosecutor has launched several programmes using modern technical means to streamline procedures and minimize obstacles for litigants with regard to attending hearings, filing complaints and hearing testimony. It allows investigations to proceed through specialized technical programmes.

22. With regard to the steps taken on the death penalty, it is sanctioned under Omani law for very serious crimes, such as certain types of murder, but it is applied in a limited set of circumstances. The Code of Criminal Procedure requires several procedures to be undergone prior to application of the penalty. Article 221, paragraph 2, provides that a criminal court may only hand down a death sentence by unanimous opinion. Prior to issuing the sentence, it must send the documents to a committee formed by order of His Majesty the Sultan, headed by the Grand Mufti of the Sultanate or his deputy and including two experts nominated by the committee's Chair, to provide an opinion from the perspective of the sharia. If it fails to provide a response within 60 days following receipt of the documents, then the court shall rule on the case. If unanimity is not reached, the death sentence shall be replaced by the penalty of life imprisonment. An appeal of a death sentence is obligatory, so the court is automatically required to review the validity of its decision and ensure it is free from any legal error.

23. With regard to data on women on death row, the Sultanate of Oman can report that a total of two women were executed in the 2018–2022 period. There were no cases of execution of women with disabilities.

24. With regard to whether and how gendered vulnerabilities, such as trauma and gender-based violence against women, could have been taken into consideration as mitigating factors in the cases of women on death row, legislation in the Sultanate of Oman, based on article 78 of the Penal Code, provides that when issuing a sentence, it must be taken into account if the perpetrator suffered from loss of awareness, mental deficiency or severe provocation on the part of the victim during commission of the crime. The perpetrator's condition must be assessed by experts pursuant to

authorization by decision of the Public Prosecutor, in accordance with article 116 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

25. With regard to whether the death penalty is also applied to women who acted in self-defence, article 46 of the Penal Code specifies the conditions for legitimate self-defence, and provides that there shall be no crime if the act is committed in exercise of the right of legitimate self-defence. Those conditions are as follows:

(a) The person defending themselves faced the imminent threat of a crime against their person, honour or property, or the person, honour or property of another, or they believed that such danger was imminent and formed that belief on reasonable grounds.

(b) The person defending themselves was unable to have timely recourse to public authorities to ward off the threat.

(c) There was no other means to ward off the threat.

(d) The act of self-defence was necessary to ward off the attack and proportionate to it.

(e) The act of self-defence was directed at the source of the attack.

If it is established in the course of the investigation that the woman acted in self-defence, she will be treated in the light of the prescribed conditions.

26. With regard to the prohibition of the execution of pregnant women and women with children, article 293 of the Code of Criminal Procedure provides that enforcement of a death sentence against a pregnant woman shall be postponed until she has given birth. If she gives birth to a live baby, enforcement is postponed a further two years for nursing. If the baby dies before then, the sentence is enforced 40 days after the date of death. If she gives birth to a stillborn fetus, the death penalty shall be enforced 60 days after the date of delivery.

27. With regard to procedures taken to provide qualified legal counsel, the Sultanate of Oman notes that the appointment of an attorney is obligatory in cases rising to the level of capital punishment. Such cases are heard before the criminal chamber of the Court of Appeal. The law requires the attorney to be of the rank of appellate attorney and to be experienced.

28. With regard to the provision of detailed information on the particular case mentioned in the list of issues, the State gives its assurance that it has been scrupulous about providing data and indicators in its periodic reports. We can provide a brief summary the incident, which went through all levels of litigation, at our forthcoming dialogue with the Committee.

National machinery for the advancement of women

29. With regard to the recommendation in paragraph 16 (b) of the concluding observations concerning the adoption of an action plan that clearly defines the competence of the steering committee that monitors the implementation of the national strategy for women, it was noted in the fourth periodic report that the strategy was incorporated into the 2016–2025 social action strategy. The executive action plan of the strategy includes programmes for women in its family and community development component. That component aims to realize equitable national family policies, legislation and programmes based on indicators and to be supportive of family stability and cohesion. Output 1.3 is: Empowerment programmes that will reinforce the right of women and family members to take part in economic, social and political life. Output 1.4 is: Institutionalized preventive and proactive initiatives and programmes that will enhance the status of women and family cohesion. Other

components of the plan include programmes and activities related to the empowerment of women with disabilities, elderly women, and women on social security and limited incomes.

30. With regard to providing detailed information on the mandate and authority of the National Commission for Family Affairs and its presence at the governorate and local levels, we note that the Commission is not a primary implementing body that requires a presence at the governorate level. The member bodies of the Commission are considered implementing sections, with each having implementing departments at the governorate level. What the Commission decides upon is circulated at all implementing levels by its main units. The Commission is a coordinating body for efforts by official agencies and entities. The relation between it and the Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention is one of constructive interaction and complementarity based on review and discussion of topics related to women's issues within the work and activities of the Commission. In addition, the staff of the National Commission for Family Affairs are included in training courses and programmes related to women. Recommendations related to women emanating from the National Commission for Family Affairs are included on the agenda of the Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention.

31. With regard to the provision of information on the Committee to Monitor Implementation of the Convention and its mandate, the Department of Women's Affairs at the Ministry of Social Development is the technical secretariat of this Committee. It is charged with drafting plans and implementing programmes relating to women and the Convention through specialized and expert staff. The directorates of social development in the governorates, represented by the family development departments and their women's and children's sections, are also working to develop and implement specialized programmes for women in the various areas of empowerment. There is also partnership and complementarity with the government and private sectors and civil society institutions.

32. With regard to clarifying the nature of the revenues of the National Commission for Family Affairs, further to the response of the Sultanate of Oman to paragraph 16(b) of the concluding observations and further to paragraph 33 of our fourth periodic report, the Commission's annual budget is drafted on the basis of the annual plan it proposes in addition to the decisions issued at periodic meetings.

33. In continuation of the training discussed in paragraph 47 of the fourth periodic report, in 2022, the Sultanate of Oman continued to build the capacity of employees of specialized institutions by holding further training courses on the gender-based approach in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund office for the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Those courses were provided for 39 specialized staff. The State will continue holding these specialized courses for all the development sectors.

National human rights institution

34. With regard to compliance with the Paris Principles, the importance of the Oman Human Rights Commission and its responsibilities were reaffirmed by Royal Decree No. 57/2022 of 4 July 2022 (see annex III). Pursuant to that decree, the Commission was reorganized and its working methods renewed, making it completely independent. In addition, there is now a direct link between the Commission and His Majesty the Sultan because the decree provides that the Commission will submit its annual report to the Sultan. The new by-laws of the Commission provide that it must be composed of experienced human rights specialists and representatives of government agencies involved in human rights work, in compliance with the principle of pluralist representation, which is stipulated in the Paris Principles. The decree

provides that the Commission shall elect, at its first meeting, a chair and a vice-chair from among its members who are not representatives of government agencies. It also provides that decisions must be adopted with the support of the majority of civil society representatives in attendance. In the event of a tie vote, the chair of the meeting casts the deciding vote, thereby strengthening the independence of the Commission. The decree also provides that representatives of government agencies shall participate in the work of the Commission, without the right to vote, and attend its meetings, so that the Commission can benefit from their expertise and so that they can serve as liaisons between the Commission and the agencies they represent.

35. Other mandates granted to the Commission under the new by-laws include the development of a national human rights strategy, monitoring abuses and receiving complaints, and conducting field visits to determine the situation of human rights. In addition, the Commission is responsible for raising awareness and enhancing education by organizing conferences, sessions and seminars on human rights. At the international level, the Commission is competent to cooperate with international human rights mechanisms, prepare reports and participate in meetings concerning human rights at the regional and international levels.

Non-governmental organizations and women human rights defenders

36. With reference to paragraph 40 of the fourth periodic report, on the enactment of a new law to strengthen the role of civil society organizations, the draft law on civil associations is still in the legislative stage. It is not possible to say when it will be promulgated until all legislative procedures have been completed. Article 4 of the current law specifies the type of activities in which an association may engage or the fields in which it may work, which are caring for orphans, childcare, maternal care, women's services, caring for the elderly and caring for persons with disabilities and special needs, as well as any other fields or activities that the relevant minister believes are appropriate, after obtaining the approval of the Cabinet. A total of 60 women's associations are active in the field of women's affairs, with six branches distributed over the various governorates and districts of Oman. There are 21 charitable associations and there are 10 branches. Their membership stands at 2,345 women and 3,662 men. The number of charitable institutions stands at 10, and they have 11 female members.

37. In order to enhance measures to protect women human rights defenders, the Oman Human Rights Commission works closely with civil society organizations, in general, and the Omani Women's Association, in particular. The Commission visits these institutions periodically in order to hold meetings with their members, and it forms working groups with civil society institutions. In addition, it strives to support these institutions by building capacity in the field of writing shadow reports for various United Nations mechanisms. The Commission participates in the process of making recommendations on strengthening the role and work of civil society institutions through its annual report and the shadow reports submitted to the United Nations.

Stereotypes

38. The State, in keeping with its emphasis on eliminating discriminatory attitudes and all forms of subordination under the law and in society, affirmed in its fourth periodic report that, pursuant to Royal Decree 3/2019, it had withdrawn its reservation to article 15, paragraph 4, of the Convention, which provides that States Parties shall accord to men and women the same rights with regard to the law relating to the movement of persons and the freedom to choose their residence and domicile. The State, in paragraph 157 of its fourth periodic report, affirmed the right of women to obtain passports pursuant to Royal Decree No. 11/2010.

39. With regard to the elimination of discriminatory attitudes in education, the Education in School Act was promulgated by Royal Decree 31/2023. Article 42 of the act provides that students have an equal right to receive educational services, without discrimination on the basis of sex, origin, colour, language, religion, sect, domicile or social status, or for any other reason.

40. Oman has achieved gender parity in education. For the academic year 2021/22, the adjusted net enrolment rate was 98.5 per cent for females, compared with 98.2 per cent for males. Gender parity has also been achieved at the level of universities and colleges, in which the number of females exceeded the number of males enrolled. Females comprised 53.3 per cent of total admissions in higher education for the academic year 2020/21.

41. With regard to providing the support required by girls and women with disabilities, classrooms have been established in adult education centres with specialized instructors to teach such students. In addition, a programme was launched to eliminate illiteracy among persons with disability of both sexes who have never been enrolled in education.

42. The laws of Oman guarantee the legitimate rights of all persons and provide them with suitable environments, meet their needs without discrimination and encourage them to participate in all fields, with the aim of eliminating any discriminatory attitudes and providing support for women to access justice.

Harmful practices

43. The criminalization of female genital mutilation is addressed in paragraphs 50 and 51 of our fourth periodic report. The Sultanate of Oman has prohibited harmful practices, including female genital mutilation, pursuant to article 20 of the Child Act, which provides that no person, in particular a physician, nurse, or guardian, may perform or encourage or assist in the performance of traditional practices that are harmful to the health of a child. Article 4 of the related implementing regulations, which were promulgated by means of Ministerial Decision No. 125/2019 in 2019, provides that female genital mutilation, regardless of how it is performed, is a traditional practice that is harmful to the health of the child. Article 67 of the Child Act imposes a term imprisonment of not less than six months and not more than three years on perpetrators.

44. The Ministry of Education, with a view to implementing the foregoing, conducts awareness-raising programmes that are aimed at protecting all persons, male and female, from these harmful practices. The student affairs regulations for public schools, which were promulgated by Ministerial Decision No. 234/2017 of 11 July 2017 and updated by Ministerial Decision No. 261/2021 of 1 December 2021, include measures to ensure that male and female students are able to continue education. Those regulations also include provisions concerning behavioural discipline and protecting everyone from unacceptable practices.

45. With regard to the number of cases reported and investigated, the Family Protection Department, in particular its Section for Monitoring Protection Mechanisms, receive reports through the Child Protection Line or the Child Protection Committees. However, it has not received any reports of female circumcision. Should such a report be received, it would be addressed immediately by child protection officials and all possible legal measures would be taken.

46. With regard to the measures taken to enforce the minimum age of marriage, article 7 of the Personal Status Act provides that those who marry must be of sound mind and 18 years of age. Accordingly, the law firmly and explicitly establishes that the minimum age of marriage in the State is 18 years. There are 135,500 children in

the 15 to 17 age group, of whom 0.2 per cent are married. Oman has sought to spread awareness in that regard by holding many seminars and workshops for Omani families, in order to raise awareness and educate about the threats that marriage poses to the mental and physical health of girls under 18. These seminars and workshops are organized by the Ministries of Health, Social Development and Education.

Gender-based violence against women

47. The State affirms that its domestic laws criminalizes violence in general, including all forms of domestic violence. In our fourth periodic report, we note that the Penal Code, which was promulgated by Royal Decree No. 7/2018, criminalizes acts that cause material or moral harm to persons, in general, and women, in particular, and that it safeguards women's rights. In respect of the plans that the State is developing, the efforts that have been made are set out in our fourth periodic report and in paragraph 16 of the present document. We reaffirm that awareness-raising efforts are continuing with regard to the enforcement of national laws to protect women from violence.

48. With regard to the question concerning the context and meaning of the phrase "women who have been prevented from marrying" in paragraph 57 of the report, this phrase means women who wish to marry without the consent of a guardian. The law guarantees the possibility of resorting to the judiciary to have this prohibition lifted.

49. With regard to the request for information on the application of the new law mentioned in paragraph 58 of our fourth periodic report, and with reference to what was stated in paragraph 46 of the above, the State confirms that such crimes can be prosecuted pursuant to articles 253 to 262. The law enforcement authorities receive complaints, conduct full investigations and take action to deter the perpetrator.

50. With regard to the steps that are being taken to specifically criminalize violence and killings in the name of so-called "honour", the Sultanate reaffirms that its penal laws, specifically the Penal Code, criminalize all acts of violence and killing. There are no motives for which such attacks can be sanctioned or justified. The law does not contain any provision criminalizing "honour killings". Those who commit the crime of murder are prosecuted in accordance with established procedures.

51. In respect of reporting violence against women, the Sultanate has taken several measures and put in place various mechanisms to protect women from violence, including by designating the channels through which reports are submitted and establishing a follow-up mechanism. Statistical data on cases are set out in the annex to our fourth periodic report. We can provide updated statistics at our forthcoming dialogue with the Committee.

52. In order to systematize the protection of girls, the regulations concerning students enrolled in public, private and special education schools have been updated. The updates include measures that must be taken in response to cases of school violence. In 2021, regulations were issued on how certain types of behaviour in public and private schools should be addressed.

53. With regard to the training provided to police officers on handling complaints and victims of domestic violence, the Officer Training Institute at the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences operates on a policy of continuously building the capacities of police officers in the field of human rights, including by offering advanced courses on dealing with domestic violence cases. In addition, the Family Protection Department of the Ministry of Social Development, in cooperation with partners, regularly organizes training sessions for individuals, officers and specialists on how to deal with victims of domestic violence.

54. With regard to the measures in place to protect women from violence, the State addresses cases of violence against women and girls through the Royal Oman Police. The perpetrators of such acts are arrested and the security and safety of survivors is ensured. The Office of the Public Prosecutor investigates, collects evidence and files charges. In addition, survivors are referred to the Family Protection Department of the Ministry of Social Development. Detailed information on that department can be found in paragraph 57 of our fourth periodic report.

55. With regard to the “stakeholders” mentioned in paragraph 60 of the fourth periodic report, Oman notes that the wording used in the Arabic version of the report is “relevant authorities”, which was translated as “stakeholders” in the English version of the report. In this case, the relevant authorities are the competent authorities, which are all government agencies involved with monitoring the implementation of the Convention in cooperation with the Oman Human Rights Commission and civil society organizations.

56. With regard to the safeguards in place to ensure that women victims of domestic violence are not forced into mediation by family pressure, Oman confirms that the procedures for submitting reports to law enforcement and judicial authorities include many legal safeguards that are guaranteed by the Basic Statute of the State (constitution) and the Code of Criminal Procedure, such as the personal and absolute right to submit and withdraw a report. Article 4 of that law provides that the Office of the Public Prosecutor shall institute legal proceedings on behalf of the public with the competent court, and that such proceedings may not be halted or delayed except in the circumstances that are set out in the law. Article 10 of that law provides that a person who submits a complaint or request in relation to offences for which such submission is legally required may withdraw his/her complaint or request at any time before a definitive decision has been handed down in the case. The investigating authorities inform women victims of their rights. A withdrawal is not accepted if it is proven to the judicial authorities that it was made a result of coercion or was not made of the person’s free will. In addition, a withdrawal does not prevent the prosecution of domestic violence offences from continuing, in order to safeguard the right of society and protect its members.

57. With regard to paragraph 64 of the report and the question concerning the safeguards in place to ensure that women who report sexual abuse are under no circumstances at risk of being accused of sexual relations outside marriage (*zina*), the laws of Oman confirm that the offence of rape, as stipulated in the Penal Code, differs from the crime of adultery in respect of the conditions and grounds for the initiation of charges. There are different circumstances surrounding each, and they are brought to light by the investigation conducted by the Office of the Public Prosecutor. Article 33 of the Code of Criminal Procedure provides that judicial police officers must accept reports and complaints received in all crimes and consider them, collect information about them and set down that information in a report. In addition, the Public Prosecutor must refer the female victim to the specialized medical authority, in order to establish the injuries that she suffered as a result of the rape, and forward material evidence to the concerned technical authority. In addition, and as detailed in our fourth periodic report, victims are provided with accommodations, in accordance with the established practice of the Office of the Public Prosecutor and the Ministry of Social Development.

Trafficking in women and girls

58. With regard to the request for updated statistical data on the prosecution and conviction rates in cases of trafficking of women and girls, data for 2022 indicate that 10 cases of trafficking in persons were registered and that three cases resulted in a conviction.

59. The National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking is financed through the budgets of its membership (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Office of the Public Prosecutor, Royal Oman Police, Supreme Court, Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Information, Oman Human Rights Commission, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and General Federation of Oman Workers) and by contributions from the private sector and civil society organizations.

60. With regard to the question on rehabilitation and reintegration, the competent authorities, in cooperation with private psychological counselling centres, provide psychological care for victims of human trafficking. In addition, the competent authorities, in cooperation with civil society institutions, are making effective efforts with regard to rehabilitation on the basis of integrated scientific plans and strategies. On 6 February 2022, the Ministry of Social Development and Dar al-Ata' signed a memorandum of understanding on providing material and social support to victims of trafficking in persons, as well as providing rehabilitation, training and awareness-raising programmes to help victims and support their integration into society.

61. The Sultanate of Oman has taken several measures to address the root causes of trafficking in persons, including the adoption of a special methodology for proactively identifying victims of trafficking and for training and qualifying those who receive reports and those who conduct criminal investigation at airports and border crossings, with a view to enhancing their capabilities and skills. The Government utilizes a unified questionnaire that includes preliminary verification questions for all authorities responsible for dealing with trafficking in persons, with a view to helping those authorities identify victims. All police units take great care to ensure that reports concerning persons implicated in trafficking in persons-related offences do not cast doubt on potential victims. No victims of trafficking in persons have been arrested for committing other legal infractions.

62. The Oman Human Rights Commission, which is a member of the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking and the Group of Experts on Human Trafficking, works with the rapid intervention task force to counter trafficking in persons established by the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking. It does so by monitoring and receiving reports of trafficking in persons and referring them to the relevant authority, in order to protect women at risk of being trafficked. The Commission enhances the qualifications of its staff by raising their capacity to address trafficking in persons and by sending them to special courses on trafficking in persons. In addition, the Commission cooperates with all the competent authorities in order to raise awareness of and enhance community education regarding trafficking in persons. In December 2021, the General Federation of Oman Workers organized a training course on the role of trade unions in combating trafficking in persons.

63. The Sultanate of Oman has taken several measures to address trafficking in migrant women, who are at high risk of being exploited in domestic work. Those measures include establishing basic legal conditions for recruiting domestic workers, such as concluding an employment contract between the worker and the employer, ensuring sufficient income for the employer, and providing easy ways for workers to file complaints, if they wish, against the employer, such as by going to the Ministry of Labour or through a website. In addition, the employer is not allowed to retain a domestic worker's passport, and workers may transfer their services to another employer without requiring the approval of the employer who recruited them in the following cases: expiration of the employment contract; expiration of the resident card, provided that there is no valid employment contract registered with the Ministry; termination of the contract by the employer; issuance of a court ruling ordering the transfer a worker's services; or arbitrary dismissal.

Participation in political and public life

64. The State reaffirms the information on women's participation in decision-making set out in paragraphs 77 and 78 of the fourth periodic report. The royal decree that was issued in 2020 establishing the new administrative apparatus of the State (see annex IV) ensures that women occupy several leadership positions, including minister, undersecretary and member of the Council of State, the Shura Council and municipal councils. As noted in paragraph 77 of the fourth periodic report, women hold leadership positions in the specialized committees of the Council of State, and a woman serves as Vice-Chair of the Economic Committee. Public and private higher education institutions have strived to increase women's participation in advisory councils and specialized student committees. Indeed, women now chair some committees. The preceding confirms that women have the right to be nominated for, elected to and participate in all elected councils.

65. Women's participation in public life has been enhanced in other ways, including through the membership of three women of the Board of Directors of the General Federation of Oman Workers. In addition, 83 women are members of the administrative bodies of trade unions and associations; 554 women are members of 59 committees established for working women in trade unions and associations; and 27 female members of the administrative bodies of trade unions and associations participated in collective bargaining aimed at improving the labour regulations for and conditions in private sector establishments. Moreover, women participated in 50 local and international meetings and training courses.

66. The Sultanate of Oman has adopted several measures to empower women in decision-making positions. In addition to increasing women's political participation in the elections for the tenth session (2023–2026) of the Shura Council (see paragraph 79 of the fourth periodic report), the Sultanate has developed a package of technical measures and mechanisms to train and empower women leaders, and to hold youth dialogue meetings and encounters with civil society institutions aimed at ensuring effective participation in the electoral process. There is greater participation by women in the third session of the municipal councils (2023–2026). Currently, 12 women are members of municipal councils. Annex V provides information on the number of eligible voters in the elections for the third session of the municipal councils, and annex VI shows the number of voters who voted in those elections in 2022. The figures reflect equal representation of women.

67. In addition, the gender statistics database available on the National Centre for Statistics and Information data portal provides indicators related to women's empowerment and political participation in elections by gender. These indicators are a key tool for measuring the changes that occur in society and determining the level of women's participation in various areas of development.

Nationality

68. With reference to paragraphs 84 and 85 of the fourth periodic report on ensuring equality between men and women with regard to marriage to foreigners, Royal Decree No. 23/2023 on marriage between Omanis and foreigners was issued. In addition, the Royal Oman Police, in order to promote family stability in accordance with the Basic Statute of the State, is in the process of amending and harmonizing the implementing regulations of the Aliens' Residency Act with the provisions of that decree, in order to ensure that foreign spouses and children of Omani men or women have the right to obtain family reunification visas.

69. The Sultanate of Oman reaffirms that it guarantees citizenship rights to both sexes so that they may exercise their fundamental rights, including freedom of

expression, assembly and association, in accordance with articles 19 and 35 of the Basic Statute of the State.

Education

70. In reference to paragraphs 86 and 87 of the fourth periodic report, which concern equal educational opportunities, and in order to promote gender-equal representation, the Sultanate of Oman affirms that there is no gender discrimination when it comes to higher education enrolment in any field, including science, technology, engineering and mathematics. In particular, there is no discrimination with respect to family care-taking responsibilities. Women make up about 50 per cent of all students.

71. With reference to paragraph 95 of the fourth periodic report, on the promotion of vocational training opportunities for women and girls and the issue of determining “specializations suitable for women”, the State affirms that all professional training courses – the professional diploma track, the general vocational education diploma track, the professional apprenticeship track and the vocational training courses track – are offered to both sexes and that no specializations are unsuitable for women.

72. With respect to updated information on dropout rates, the dropout rate for students in grades 1–4 is 0 per cent for both sexes. The dropout rate was 35 per cent for females across all educational levels, compared with 6 per cent for males.

73. With regard to efforts taken to ensure that pregnant girls, young women and mothers are reintegrated into education, a provision in the student affairs regulations prohibiting female students from continuing formal studies after marriage has been abolished. Accordingly, married female students can now continue their formal studies.

Employment

74. The Sultanate of Oman affirms that its labour laws are free of any discriminatory provisions in respect of hiring, wages, training, promotions and termination of service. Article 80 of the Labour Law stipulates that all provisions relating to employment must apply equally to women, without discrimination. Ministry of Labour employment statistics for 2022 show that 1,785 Omani men were employed in the public sector, compared with 4,395 Omani women. In the private sector, 11,545 Omani men were first-time appointees, compared with 10,107 women. Those statistics confirm that women face no employment discrimination in either the public or private sector.

75. With regard to the channels available to victims to report workplace discrimination, national legislation allows public sector employees to file lawsuits, including for workplace discrimination, with the Administrative Court against the administrative body that employs them. In order to facilitate the filing of complaints by women private-sector workers, the relevant authorities have adopted several reporting mechanisms. Workers may appeal directly to labour welfare departments and their branches in all governorates, call a toll-free hotline (800777000) or submit an electronic complaint via the website. With regard to acts of harassment against women employees, national legislation stipulates procedures for the filing of complaints with judicial and law enforcement authorities. Dismissal of women workers is discussed in detail in paragraph 96 of the fourth periodic report.

76. Regarding the request for updated information on the draft law on paternity leave and any plans to extend the current duration of maternity leave, the draft law is still under review, as indicated in paragraph 97 of the fourth periodic report.

77. To confirm what was stated in paragraph 48 of the fourth periodic report on raising awareness with regard to the equal sharing of family and household

responsibilities, the State continues to implement the Tamasuk marital counselling programme. The aim of the programme is to empower and prepare those about to get married in all governorates and to provide them with the skills to carry out shared family responsibilities. It also aimed at familiarizing them with the laws related to the family and the importance of undergoing medical examinations and the necessary tests before marriage. As at the end of 2022, 38,506 people (both men and women) had participated in 389 such programmes.

78. The State endeavours to employ women in all public and private sector fields without setting employment quotas and has adopted flexible work rules that give equal consideration to both women and men. The State encourages private sector employers to hire women. The State reaffirms that hiring processes are non-discriminatory and that job vacancy announcements reflect business needs.

Women migrant workers

79. With reference to paragraph 102 of the fourth periodic report, the State affirms that the Ministry of Labour has now resumed its update of the list of labour recruitment agencies. With regard to access to legal aid by domestic workers, the Sultanate of Oman has adopted several complaint mechanisms, detailed in paragraph 75. In the event of a dispute between two parties, they may refer the complaint to the labour dispute settlement circuit. Complaints are submitted to the judge appointed to those circuits, in implementation of the provisions of the Simplifying Litigation Procedures in Respect of Certain Disputes Act, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 125/2020.

80. With regard to legal assistance for domestic workers, the General Federation of Oman Workers provides them with legal services on the same footing as other workers, offering legal advice and helping them to register labour complaints in cases where they have not been able to settle their disputes with their employers. It also provides domestic workers with legal support at dispute investigation hearings held by the dispute settlement departments and offices of the Ministry of Labour and, in the event that they wish to pursue litigation, furnishes them with statements of claim and response and legal memorandums filed with the courts.

81. Upon receiving reports from domestic workers of rights violations, the Oman Human Rights Commission provides legal counselling and refers these workers to the relevant national mechanisms, so that they can obtain redress in cooperation with the relevant authorities. The Committee also raises awareness among domestic workers by issuing such publications as the *Domestic Workers' Guide*, which has been disseminated widely and printed in several languages.

82. The Sultanate of Oman guarantees protection of domestic workers from all forms of violence, including gender-based violence, and has created several national mechanisms to which domestic workers may resort if they experience any form of violence, as mentioned above in the section on violence.

83. With reference to the phrase “appropriate checks”, mentioned in paragraph 103 of the fourth periodic report, the State affirms that foreign workers (whether hired to work in the private sector or in the home and in comparable settings) may transfer their services to another employer without requiring the consent of the recruiting employer in a number of cases, as detailed above in paragraph 63.

84. As for the steps taken to ensure that workers are able to leave their employers without being charged with “absconding”, the State clarifies that domestic workers may file a labour complaint in the event that the employer does not adhere to the employment contract. In accordance with Ministerial Decision No. 270/2018, the employer may not file a report of abandonment of post in such a case. It should be

noted that the term “abscond” is not used, but rather, “leave”. If the employer submits a report that a domestic worker has left her job, she may file an objection to the report with the labour welfare department at the Ministry of Labour. In addition, a domestic worker may transfer her services and work for another employer in the cases outlined above.

85. The Sultanate of Oman affirms that forced labour is criminalized under the Combating Trafficking in Persons Act promulgated by Royal Decree No. 126/2008. It is mentioned in paragraph 107 of the fourth periodic report that article 2 of the act stipulates that anyone who, by means of coercion, threat, deception, abuse of position or influence or by taking advantage of a person’s vulnerability or by using power over that person or by any other illegitimate means, whether direct or indirect, deliberately uses, transfers, houses or receives a person for the purpose of exploiting him or her is considered to have committed the crime of human trafficking. Exploitation can take many forms. Some are listed in article 1 of the aforementioned act. These include exploitation for prostitution, sexual abuse, forced labour, servitude, any practices that resemble servitude or slavery and organ removal. Therefore, in order to avoid duplication of criminal provisions and in adherence to the general principle of *generalia specialibus non derogant*, there is no need to amend the Penal Code.

86. Article 3 bis of the Labour Code stipulates that employers are prohibited from imposing any form of forced or compulsory labour. Such act is punishable under article 123, which stipulates that anyone who violates article 3 bis shall be punished by either or both of imprisonment for a period not exceeding one month and a fine not exceeding 500 rials, and that the penalty shall be doubled for a repeated violation.

87. The measures taken to enforce the prohibition on confiscation of passports are addressed in paragraph 63, on trafficking in persons, of the present report. The State affirms that the rights of female domestic workers are guaranteed, including the right to medical care during pregnancy and maternity, and, if they wish, a travel ticket for return to the country of origin.

Economic and social benefits

88. In its tenth five-year development plan (2021–2025), the Government of the Sultanate of Oman approved a strategic goal of providing integrated social protection to the neediest groups to enable them to become self-reliant and contribute to the national economy. To this end, it has created a strategic programme, entitled “A greater and more efficient contribution to the empowerment system in the national economy”, which is aimed at developing solutions to address low participation by families on social assistance and low-income individuals in various social empowerment programmes (such as direct employment, on-the-job training, entrepreneurship).

89. In order to improve women’s financial literacy and to spread awareness of financial literacy among school students of both sexes and to prepare them to keep pace with economic developments in line with Oman Vision 2040, the Sultanate of Oman has been implementing a project to enhance financial literacy among students in accordance with Ministerial Decision No. 105/2022. That endeavour is proceeding along two lines: first, the curriculum is being developed to include financial literacy concepts and principles tailored to specific units and topics, in addition to the introduction of an entrepreneurship unit for tenth grade students; and second, programmes and events related to financial literacy are being implemented, such as the Baisa financial planning programme, the Company programme, My School Product, Oman Is My Destination, the work experience programme, the small investor programme and the My Career Guide programme on financial and economic management.

90. In order to ensure women's access to credit and loans, Decision No. 19/2022 of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion approves regulations for the funding of artisans and small and medium enterprises. The Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority funds such artisans and enterprises through the following approved financing programmes: local value-added financing, industrial projects and services financing, working capital and fixed asset financing, incubated business and business accelerator financing, financing for artisanal products and home-based business and productive work; street vendors and mobile business activities; and contract financing.

91. In 2021, the Central Bank, in order to increase access by women with disabilities to microcredit and loans, issued a circular on the subject of such banking services. It was devoted in its entirety on how to benefit from banking products and services, such as personal loans and the creation of digital solutions to facilitate access for people with hearing disabilities, so that they can manage their financial affairs with complete privacy and independence and protect their rights as consumers. In addition, the Capital Market Authority issued a circular for insurance companies on providing benefits for persons with disabilities.

92. With regard to the empowerment of rural women, paragraph 140 of the fourth periodic report contained a discussion of a financing product, Rifi, which is aimed at increasing the incomes of rural families, improving their economic and social conditions, enhancing rural women's productive, manufacturing and marketing capabilities, encouraging women's participation in local economic development, connecting women's products with local and regional markets, and supporting and promoting entrepreneurship among women in rural areas. A portfolio of 12 million Omani rials (\$31.2 million) has been allocated and is subject to annual increase. Across all governorates, there were a total of 149 funded applications and 24 promotional campaigns for the Rifi product during the period 2022–2023. Eleven educational campaigns on food safety and quality have been implemented. Seven courses have been held for Rifi members, benefiting 696 trainees and agricultural entrepreneurs, as well as 149 Rifi members. The Rifi online platform also promotes, markets and sells the products of rural women and rural entrepreneurs in agriculture, fisheries and related industries. The platform offers products of all types and sizes, and is targeted at Omani, regional and global consumers, as well as wholesalers and retailers. There are a total of 20 online marketplaces for rural women's products.

93. In order to improve the economic and social conditions of women and families on social security, persons with limited incomes, entrepreneurs and job seekers, and to complement the role of the relevant authorities detailed in paragraphs 131 and 132 of the fourth periodic report, the State is continuing to implement the Tamkeen national programme, which enhances training initiatives and programmes, trade fairs and smart sales platforms with a view to fostering financial returns and economic and social stability. In addition, the Maksab platform was recently launched. Annex VII lists programmes and initiatives that have benefited 637 individuals.

Rural women

94. With regard to the results of the analytical study on rural women's land ownership rights and progress made on Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the relevant State authorities explain that they, in partnership with legal experts at law enforcement agencies, have taken measures to follow up on those results through the implementation of a plan to educate rural women on their land ownership rights. Some 1,699 rural women's empowerment programmes, 611 guidance programmes, 269 awareness programmes and 103 events, forums and discussion meetings for rural women were implemented during 2022, benefiting 2,703 women. The programmes were targeted at job seekers, agricultural entrepreneurs and school and university

students. They were supplemented by 937 programmes for rural women on the production of Omani honey and on breeding animals and poultry, including 354 programmes for rural women in the governorates on plant farming and 334 on honeybee breeding and production. In 2022, there were seven media programmes in support.

95. In order to highlight the important role of rural women and agricultural entrepreneurs, the Ministry of Social Development honoured 10 such women during Omani Women's Day celebrations on 17 October 2022.

Equality before the law

96. In paragraph 157 of its fourth periodic report, the Sultanate of Oman affirmed, in response to paragraph 51 of the concluding observations of the Committee and the recommendations contained in paragraph 52, that Royal Decree No. 11/2010 guarantees that women are entitled to obtain a passport without permission from a male guardian, and that no practices have been monitored that would prevent women from exercising their legally prescribed right. Government agencies work in partnership with civil society to raise awareness of women's rights.

97. The issue of mothers travelling with their children is a substantive, case-by-case matter. The courts have full discretion to allow a child to travel with a caregiver, provided that it is in the child's best interest.

Marriage and family relations

98. With regard to the provisions of the Personal Status Law, under Omani law, men have responsibilities towards women with regard to alimony, housing, food and social and material security. These provisions are compatible with men's marital responsibilities. Moreover, women are not obligated by religious or secular law to provide alimony. Pursuant to article 49 of the Personal Status Law, that is the case even if they are wealthy. Women have absolute control over their money and property.

99. With regard to the equal rights of women and men to property acquired during and after marriage, the State affirms that women have financial autonomy. According to article 37 (4) of the Personal Status Law, the husband is not entitled to his wife's property, and she is allowed to dispose of her property as she pleases.

100. Article 277 of the Code of Civil and Commercial Procedure allows women to appeal any unfavourable ruling issued by the sharia court chamber of the court of first instance, provided that the appeal is filed within 15 days of the day following the issuance of the judgment or decision. Under article 239 of the code, women may file appeals with the Supreme Court.

101. As part of the implementation of Oman Vision 2040, the Sultanate of Oman is currently in the process of passing or amending laws and has plans to amend, develop and update laws on women's rights.