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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Third periodic report submitted by Turkmenistan under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant, due in 2023*

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is the third periodic report of Turkmenistan on key legislative, judicial, administrative, practical and other measures taken during the reporting period to implement the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
2. The concluding observations made by the Committee at its 58th meeting, held on 12 October 2018 in Geneva, were duly taken into account in the preparation of the report.
3. The report reflects the measures that the Government has adopted to give effect to the rights recognized in the Covenant and the progress made in the enjoyment of those rights.
4. The legislation of Turkmenistan and material and information from State bodies and voluntary associations were used to prepare the report. Efforts to familiarize the general public with the content of this report began at the drafting stage. The Interdepartmental Commission on Compliance with the International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law Obligations Undertaken by Turkmenistan held a number of interdepartmental meetings and consultations with international experts and those from United Nations agencies. The draft report was circulated to ministries and departments and voluntary associations, and their comments and suggestions were taken into account in preparing the final version.
5. In February 2022, the National Programme for the Socioeconomic Development of Turkmenistan for the period 2022–2052 was adopted. Among the priorities of this programme is the ever-increasing role of human capital as the main factor in the country's economic development and the formation of a new social model of development to ensure a high standard of living for the people of Turkmenistan.
6. In 2022, the President's Programme for the Socioeconomic Development of Turkmenistan for the period 2022–2028 was also adopted. The main objectives of the Programme are to ensure sustainable economic growth of the country, structural transformation of all sectors of the economy, the creation of a sound infrastructure, greater integration into the global economic system, the encouragement of innovation and introduction of digital systems in all spheres of production, an increase in the role of the private sector and the achievement of living standards equal to those of the economically developed countries of the world.
7. Since 2019, Turkmenistan has developed and adopted more than 50 medium- and long-term national programme documents aimed at further improving living standards and social protection, human capital, healthy lifestyles and environmental security, sustainable industrialization, economic growth and productive employment, infrastructure development and innovation.
8. As a result of the implementation of measures under the programme documents for the period 2019–2022, cash income per household increased by 32.7 per cent, average monthly wages in large and medium-sized enterprises by 34.6 per cent, average monthly pensions by 33.7 per cent and State benefits by 48.2 per cent.
9. Industrial output for the period 2019–2022 increased by 27.8 per cent, agriculture by 30.3 per cent and State budget revenues by 50.1 per cent. There has been a significant increase in State budget expenditure on health care (27.6 per cent) and education (37.7 per cent). About 75 per cent of the State budget of Turkmenistan is allocated to social development. Of the total amount of State budget funds allocated for public and social services in 2023, 39 per cent was spent on education, 14.1 per cent on health care, 2.6 per cent on culture, 34.7 per cent on the State social security system and 9.6 per cent on housing and utilities.
10. The following plans have been approved by presidential decisions with a view to improving the work of the country's State bodies and civil society organizations in safeguarding human rights and freedoms and giving effect to the rules of international humanitarian law in the legislation and law enforcement practice of Turkmenistan: the National Plan of Action on Human Rights for the period 2021–2025; the National Plan of Action for Gender Equality for the period 2021–2025; the National Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons for the period 2020–2022; the National Plan of Action for the

Realization of Children's Rights for the period 2023–2028; and the National Plan of Action for the Elimination of Statelessness in Turkmenistan for the period 2019–2024. A national action plan to combat trafficking in persons for the period 2024–2026 is currently being developed.

II. Information on the implementation of the concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted following its consideration of the second periodic report of Turkmenistan at its 58th meeting, held on 12 October 2018 (E/C.12/TKM/CO/2)

A. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 5 of the concluding observations

Application of the Covenant

11. During the reporting period, the following acts were adopted in the area of the protection and development of economic, social and cultural human rights: Act amending the Social Protection Code (20 October 2018, 1 December 2018, 30 November 2019, 13 March 2021, 13 November 2021, 17 April 2022); Prevention of Harmful Effects of Alcohol Act (1 December 2018); Act amending the Labour Code (2 March 2019, 5 October 2019, 22 August 2020, 24 July 2022); Act amending the Drinking Water Act (30 November 2019); Act on Electronic Documents, Electronic Document Management and Digital Services (14 March 2020); Act amending the Voluntary Associations Act (22 August 2020); Act amending the Tax Code (22 August 2020, 24 July 2022); Prevention of Infectious Diseases Act (13 March 2021); Education Act (revised version) (5 June 2021); Legal Status of Foreign Nationals in Turkmenistan Act (13 November 2021); Social Services Act (18 December 2021); Non-Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control Act (18 December 2021); Act amending the Criminal Code and enacting it in its new wording (17 April 2022); Electronic Government Act (24 July 2022); Act amending the Anti-Corruption Act (24 July 2022); National Youth Policy Act (revised version) (1 September 2022); Local Self-Government Act (20 November 2022); and others.

12. In Turkmenistan, international obligations are implemented through the transposition of fundamental international legal rules into national laws and regulations. The legislative acts of Turkmenistan take into account the provisions of the international conventions to which it is a party, including the Covenant.

13. With a view to improving the work of the courts, experience is exchanged, judicial practice of foreign courts is studied, and judges and court officials participate in international seminars. The judiciary works actively with international organizations and specialized institutions (Council of Europe, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), German Society for International Cooperation) in the areas of human rights and freedoms, gender equality, children's rights, the fight against terrorism and extremism, trafficking in persons, the prevention of transnational crime, the protection of the rights of refugees, freedom of speech, the improvement of administrative proceedings and other aspects of the legal sphere. During the period 2018–2023, more than 125 judges and judicial officers were trained at international training sessions and seminars on human rights issues. On 4 and 5 September 2023, Ashgabat hosted the fifth regional seminar for administrative judges from Central Asian countries and international experts on the subject "Administrative jurisdiction and types of administrative claims".

14. The Supreme Court organizes twice a year two-week training courses for judges and court staff. Classes are conducted by experienced judges and international experts. They discuss topics on different categories of cases and the particularities of considering them and emphasize the importance of observing the rights and legitimate interests of participants in judicial proceedings.

15. Scheduled training sessions are organized on an ongoing basis to familiarize the personnel of the internal affairs agencies with the Covenant and to enhance their capacity to ensure the realization of economic, social and cultural rights. During the period 2018–2023, the internal affairs agencies held 1,438 training sessions on the above-mentioned topics.

16. During the same period, the staff of the Ministry of Justice participated in 349 professional development seminars, and 92 lawyers participated in 40 seminars.

B. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 7 of the concluding observations

Data collection

17. A complete population and housing census was conducted from 17 to 27 December 2022. In order to further improve national statistics and its contribution to the implementation of the policy framework for the development of a digital economy in Turkmenistan until 2025, the Government of Turkmenistan decided to conduct the census electronically, without the use of paper. Guidelines for the preparation and conduct of the census were developed in accordance with international standards and were highly appreciated by the experts of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

18. As of 17 December 2022, the population of Turkmenistan was 7,057,841. Of the total population, 22.9 per cent are in Mary Province, 22 per cent in Dashoguz Province, 20.5 per cent in Lebap Province, 14.6 per cent in Ashgabat, 12.5 per cent in Ahal Province and 7.5 per cent in Balkan Province:

- Almost 50 per cent of the population is male and more than 50 per cent female; 47.1 per cent are urban dwellers and 52.9 per cent live in villages.
- People of working age predominate in the age structure of the population, accounting for 57 per cent of the total, while the share of the population below and above working age is 34.9 per cent and 8.1 per cent respectively.

19. According to the census, housing is being built at a high rate in all the communities of Turkmenistan. The number of residential buildings increased by 12.4 per cent, apartment buildings by 13.6 per cent, and their total area by 24.5 per cent, compared to the 2012 census. The statistical data obtained will serve as a knowledge base for the preparation of programmes and strategies for the socioeconomic development of the country and regions for the next few years.

20. Turkmenistan keeps records on the State statistical reporting form entitled “Report on the number of pensioners and recipients of State benefits and the amounts of monthly pensions and benefits paid to them” on a quarterly basis. This form reflects information on recipients of disability pensions and State benefits for persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities under the age of 18 and persons with disabilities since childhood.

21. In accordance with the National Plan of Action on Human Rights for the period 2016–2020, the State Statistics Committee, the Ministry of Health and the Medical Industry and the Pension Fund concluded an agreement on cooperation and interdepartmental exchange of information on disability statistics, in follow-up to the measure to establish a State register of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities. An electronic disability card has been created on the basis of this agreement.

22. The State Statistics Committee, in cooperation with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), initiated a survey in 2021 on the situation of children and adults with disabilities covered by the social protection system in Turkmenistan. A sample survey was conducted in all regions of the country and included both urban and rural households.

23. The main purpose of the sample survey was to assess and analyse the specific features of communication by persons with disabilities covered by the social protection system in Turkmenistan, according to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health for Children and Youth. Information from the survey is used to analyse the status and provision of quality and inclusive services for persons with disabilities.

24. The State Statistics Committee has completed the process of establishing the national platform for the collection and dissemination of data on the Sustainable Development Goals under the joint project of UNDP and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs entitled “Partnering for SDG acceleration”. The platform for the implementation of the Goals is available on the website of the State Statistics Committee (<https://www.stat.gov.tm/#>).

25. This platform is based on the list of the Goal indicators adopted by Turkmenistan. The platform and the multipurpose software developed for reporting on the Goals contains detailed information, including website sliders describing the country’s achievements, metadata, charts and graphs and levels of disaggregation for the Goal indicators.

26. The creation and implementation of the platform aims to build a data monitoring and results assessment system for planning and tracking progress towards achieving the Goals in the country, fulfil international reporting obligations and produce national reports on the Goals that will be available to a wide range of users, including government agencies, the private sector and civil society organizations.

C. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 9 of the concluding observations

Independence of the judiciary

27. The independence of judges is guaranteed by the Constitution (section V, Judiciary). Article 98 provides that judges are independent and subject only to the Constitution and the law. Interference by any party in the work of the courts is prohibited and punishable by law.

28. In accordance with the Courts Act, judges are independent, subject only to the law and guided by their inner conviction. Judges are accountable to no one in the administration of justice. The Courts Act also provides that Judges are not under any obligation to provide explanations in respect of cases they have heard or pending cases. Contempt of court, disrespect of judges and interference in their work are prohibited and punishable by law.

29. According to the law, judges are appointed and dismissed by the President of Turkmenistan and serve five-year terms of office. Qualification boards, composed of judges themselves and acting independently of any influence, participate in the process of appointing and dismissing judges. On 30 September 2023, amendments were introduced to the Courts Act. The amendments include provisions on preserving judge’s powers, strengthening the role of the judges’ qualification board and others. The Committee’s recommendations have thus been consistently taken into account.

30. The termination of the powers of a judge is carried out by the President of Turkmenistan, taking into account the conclusions of the qualification board of the court. The President of the Supreme Court is dismissed by the President of Turkmenistan with the consent of the parliament.

31. A policy framework for the development of the judicial system for the period 2022–2028 was approved by a presidential decision in July 2022. The purpose of the framework is to improve the quality of the administration of justice and the judicial protection of human and civil rights and legitimate interests, to ensure the openness and accessibility of justice, to improve the conditions for the administration of justice and to ensure the independence of the judiciary.

D. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 11 of the concluding observations

National human rights institutions

32. Consultations with international organizations on the accreditation of the Office of the Ombudsman of Turkmenistan with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions began in 2020. In October 2022, at the invitation of the Ombudsman’s Office, a capacity assessment of the Office was conducted in partnership with the Asia-Pacific Forum

of National Human Rights Institutions, UNDP and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The assessment resulted in recommendations for capacity-building and follow-up to accreditation of the Ombudsman's Office by the Global Alliance. The application for accreditation is scheduled to be submitted in 2023.

33. The budget of the Ombudsman's Office for 2022 had been doubled compared to 2021. Technical support for capacity-building of the Office is provided by the UNDP, OHCHR, UNICEF, UNFPA, OSCE and other international organizations.

34. For the period 2018–2022, the Ombudsman considered 1,364 applications relating to economic, social and cultural rights.

35. The website ombudsman.gov.tm contains all annual reports of the Ombudsman since 2017, which are also published on the Turkmenistan Today website (www.tdh.gov.tm).

Table 1

Number of applications considered by the Ombudsman in the area of economic, social and cultural rights

<i>Issues</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>	<i>Total</i>
Housing law	310	217	135	121	164	947
Labour law	130	91	76	28	24	349
Right to education	7	2	0	4	5	18
Right to health	4	5	5	8	5	27
Social security	7	3	6	3	4	23

E. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 13 of the concluding observations

Civil society

36. The rights of citizens to form voluntary associations are regulated by the Voluntary Associations Act (2014). Under the Act, citizens have the right to establish the associations of their choice without prior permission from the State or local authorities as well as the right to join such associations, subject to the provisions of their statutes. A decision to deny registration of a voluntary association may be challenged in court.

37. The law guarantees the rights of voluntary associations to freely disseminate information on their activities, to hold meetings and demonstrations in the manner prescribed by law, to establish media outlets and carry out publishing activities in accordance with the law, and to assert and defend their rights and the rights and legitimate interests of their members and participants before the public authorities.

38. The Act amending the Voluntary Associations Act was adopted on 22 August 2020. The amended law provides for simplification of State registration and the cancellation of certain existing restrictions. Thus, the number of founders required to establish a national voluntary association has been reduced from 400 to 50 persons, which has advanced the process of reregistering local and regional voluntary associations as national ones. The application format has been changed so that only members of the board of a voluntary association may sign the application.

39. Restrictions on participation in the activities of voluntary associations by persons convicted of a serious or particularly serious offence have been lifted. According to the amendments to the law, voluntary associations no longer submit reports to the Ministry of Justice at its request but rather information on its activities. The law provides that a voluntary association is not liable for the obligations of its members, while at the same time members are not liable for the obligations of the association.

40. Representatives of civil society organizations were involved in the process of preparing the third periodic report of Turkmenistan on the implementation of the provisions of the Covenant. Thus, at a meeting on 13 July 2023, representatives from the following

voluntary associations, together with international experts, took part in discussions on the practical application of the Covenant: the Deaf and Blind Society of Turkmenistan; the Central Sports and Physical Training Club for Persons with Disabilities; the Support Centre for Persons with Disabilities; Enme; Mashgala; Keyik Okara; Ynam; Yashyl Shokhle; Bosphorus; the Association of Accountants of Turkmenistan; and Beyik Eyyam.

F. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 15 of the concluding observations

Anti-corruption

41. Turkmenistan is implementing the National Anti-Corruption Programme for 2020–2024, approved by a presidential decision (23 December 2019).

42. The Anti-Corruption Act (24 July 2022) introduces provisions on the conduct of an anti-corruption expert assessment of existing and proposed laws and regulations and the notion of rules and regulations that facilitate corruption.

43. In recent years, Turkmenistan has made significant progress in the development of the system of public services and has begun to introduce the e-government electronic documents management system, which is intended to become one of the important components of increasing the efficiency of the work of ministries and departments, enterprises, institutions and organizations, and of public administration as a whole.

44. The basic standards of behaviour of civil servants for the correct, honourable and proper performance of public functions and the prevention of corrupt practices are set out in the Anti-Corruption Act, the Civil Service Act and the Act on Ethics and Official Conduct of Civil Servants.

45. The Office of the Procurator General coordinates anti-corruption activities. The official website of the Office offers an opportunity to make an electronic application (statement) on cases of corruption and provides a telephone number for citizens to contact (bp.gov.tm).

46. The procuratorial authorities are investigating criminal cases and carrying out preventive measures to prevent and detect corruption offences, including in the areas of health care and education.

47. In order to prevent corrupt practices among judges, an additional article was introduced to the Court Act in 2018 on the Code of Judicial Ethics. The Code of Judicial Ethics was adopted in January 2019 at the first Conference of Judges of Turkmenistan.

G. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 17 of the concluding observations

Non-discrimination

48. The Constitution of Turkmenistan guarantees equal human and civil rights and freedoms and equality before the law and courts, irrespective of nationality, skin colour, gender, origin, property or official status, place of residence, language, attitude towards religion, political beliefs, or any other factors.

49. The parliament is debating whether it is appropriate to adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation. Parliamentary committees have held more than 10 consultative meetings and discussions with representatives of the scientific community, experts, specialists and representatives of ministries and departments and voluntary associations on this issue and to study international practice.

50. The Act on Countering the Spread of Disease Caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) of 2016 establishes the legal, organizational, economic and ethical bases for the prevention of the disease caused by HIV. The law provides for a set of measures to prevent the spread of the disease caused by the virus by:

- Ensuring the accessibility and safety of HIV medical screening with confidential and anonymous pre- and post-test counselling
- Providing anonymous medical screening for HIV free of charge
- Ensuring the confidentiality of information that medical screening for HIV has taken place and of its results
- Ensuring free access of HIV-positive persons and AIDS patients to all types of diagnostic, therapeutic and consultative assistance and drug provision in health-care facilities
- Providing social assistance to HIV-positive persons and AIDS patients and facilitating their education, employment, professional development, upskilling and retraining

51. Chapter IV of the Act on the Rights and Social Protection of HIV-positive Persons and Members of their Families establishes various kinds of social and legal protection for persons living with HIV.

52. Every citizen has the right freely to choose a place of work by directly contacting an employer or through State employment agencies (services).

53. State employment guarantees are regulated by the Employment Act, which provides for the free choice of profession, occupation and place of work at a person's discretion and ensures equal rights and opportunities for everyone in obtaining a profession, employment and remuneration commensurate with the quantity and quality of their work, and career advancement, and legal protection against any form of discrimination, unjustified refusal to hire, unlawful dismissal and termination of an employment contract.

54. Under the Act, foreign citizens and stateless persons permanently resident in Turkmenistan have the same employment rights as Turkmen citizens.

55. Information on close relatives is provided at the time of recruitment in order to comply with the provisions of article 22 of the Labour Code, under which persons who are closely related or related to each other (parents, spouses, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, and the parents, brothers, sisters and children of spouses) may not work (serve) together in the same State enterprise if, in their work (service), they are immediately (directly) subordinate to or subject to the authority of one of them, except when they hold elected positions.

56. The following disaggregated data shows the national percentages of persons registered with and employed by employment agencies (services), as well as the national percentages of employees of enterprises of all forms of ownership.

Table 2
National percentages of persons registered with and employed by employment agencies (services)

<i>Year</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>
Registered – total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>of whom:</i>				
Turkmen	92.3	89.6	88.9	92.8
Uzbeks	5.3	7.9	9.2	6.0
Russians	1.0	1.2	0.7	0.5
Baluchis	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.1
Azerbaijanis	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.1
Kazakhs	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1
Other nationalities	0.6	0.7	0.5	0.4
Employed – total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>of whom:</i>				
Turkmen	92.6	90.0	90.9	93.9

<i>Year</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>
Uzbeks	5.1	7.6	6.8	5.1
Russians	1.0	1.2	0.9	0.4
Baluchis	0.2	0.2	0.5	0.2
Azerbaijanis	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.1
Kazakhs	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1
Other nationalities	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.2

Table 3
National percentages of employees of enterprises of all forms of ownership

<i>Year</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>of whom:</i>				
Turkmen	90.5	91.0	91.0	91.4
Uzbeks	5.2	4.8	4.9	4.7
Russians	2.1	2.0	1.9	1.8
Baluchis	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2
Azerbaijanis	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.4
Kazakhs	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2
Armenians	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Tatars	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Other nationalities	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7

H. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 19 of the concluding observations

Persons with disabilities

57. Social assistance for persons with disabilities takes the form of the State allowances, pensions and benefits provided for under the Social Protection Code.

58. As of 1 January 2023, 135,900 people were receiving State disability allowances. As of 1 January 2023, 2,011 older persons with disabilities were receiving social services for older persons living alone and persons with disabilities, including 1,580 women (78.7 per cent).

59. The Constitution, the Social Protection Code and other laws guarantee persons with disabilities the full range of social, economic, political and individual rights and freedoms. Discrimination is prohibited, and the protection of the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of persons with disabilities and support for their voluntary associations as well as their rehabilitation, employment, education, vocational training, access to social infrastructure and social assistance are guaranteed.

60. The Act amending the Social Protection Code of 13 March 2021 made the notion of a person with a disability consistent with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, under which a person with a disability is defined as a person with persistent physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, when combined with various barriers, may prevent his or her full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

61. Certified disability is not an obstacle to realization of the right to work of persons with disabilities. This is evidenced by the provisions of the Labour Code, the Social Protection Code and the Education Act, which regulate the employment, education and vocational training of persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities have the right to work in

enterprises, organizations and institutions with ordinary working conditions, in specialized enterprises, in workshops and in sections that employ persons with disabilities, as well as to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

62. The Labour Code prohibits discrimination in labour relations. Refusal to conclude an employment contract on the grounds of disability is regarded as unjustified if a medical examination establishes that the state of health of these persons does not prevent the performance of professional duties and does not threaten the health and occupational safety of other persons, as well as in the case of women who have a child with disabilities under 18 years of age.

63. In accordance with the Programme for the Improvement of Employment and Creation of New Jobs in Turkmenistan 2015–2020, a regulation was approved that laid down the procedure for setting employment quotas for persons in need of special support who are unable to compete equally on the labour market. This regulation lays down the procedure for applying a quota of between 2 and 5 per cent of the total number of employees of enterprises, organizations and institutions. The quota covers persons with disabilities, persons with disabilities whose work is recommended under an individual rehabilitation programme, single parents, parents of large families, parents bringing up minor children, children with disabilities or orphans, first-time jobseekers, young specialists and other citizens in need of social support.

64. When this quota was first introduced in 2018, the number of persons employed under it amounted to 2.2 per cent of the workforce. In the following years this figure rose to 3 per cent and then 5 per cent.

65. By an order of the Minister of Health and the Medical Industry of 29 June 2020, in agreement with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, the State Statistics Committee and the National Trade Union Centre, a list was approved of types of work and professional activities, occupations and posts recommended for persons with disabilities, taking into account their functional impairment and limitations (capabilities) in their daily lives.

66. The Social Protection Code of 2018 has been amended to provide that persons with category I and category II disabilities who, in the opinion of a medical and social assessment board, can study in primary, secondary and higher vocational education institutions, do not have to take an admissions test. Persons with group III disabilities have, under equal conditions, a preferential right to enrol in primary, secondary and higher vocational education institutions. State benefits and scholarships are paid in full to persons with disabilities while they are training in any type of vocational education institution.

67. The National Policy Framework for Inclusive Education in Turkmenistan for the period 2023–2028, including a step-by-step action plan, has been drawn up with the support of UNICEF. The country is developing a system for the delivery of comprehensive services for young children with disabilities and their families through close inter-agency and intersectoral collaboration with a focus on early identification and intervention, interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary support, social habilitation and rehabilitation.

68. Children who, for health reasons, cannot attend ordinary schools are educated in special schools. Rehabilitation education providers (with preschool and school sections) are in operation in every province and in the city of Ashgabat, where all the prerequisites have been created for children with disabilities to receive a decent education and upbringing.

69. Persons with category I disabilities and family members living with them are entitled to the free use of water, gas, electricity and housing and communal services funded by the relevant authorities.

70. Under the Social Services Act of 18 December 2021, disability forms the basis for recognizing the need for social services by a person to whom such services, including home-based services, are then provided by the staff of social service institutions.

71. According to the Act on the Principles of Transport Policy (2018), one of the main thrusts of State policy is to create an accessible transportation environment and improve the accessibility of transportation services for people with disabilities.

72. In order to create conditions under which persons with disabilities and older persons can participate fully and effectively in the life of society and lead a more active life, on 29 June 2020 the Chair of the Road Transport Agency, acting in agreement with the relevant authorities, approved the rules for the organization of social taxi services for persons with disabilities.

73. Under the Urban Planning Act (2015), State urban planning policy is designed to ensure the sustainable development of society through urban planning to improve the living environment, including by taking into account the specific requirements of persons with disabilities. The relevant urban planning authority supervises compliance with State urban planning standards and rules, including those safeguarding the interests of persons with disabilities.

74. Since 2017, pursuant to a presidential decree, free housing and residential accommodation has been built in the provinces and the city of Ashgabat for persons in particular need of State support, including persons with disabilities, to secure their integration into society and social protection. The construction of this social housing was financed from the State budget.

75. Businesses run by voluntary associations of persons with disabilities, whose authorized capital belongs entirely to the association of persons with disabilities that employ at least 20 persons with disabilities and where at least 70 per cent of the employees are persons with disabilities, are exempt from income tax and value added tax.

76. Under the Tax Code, workers with disabilities are exempt from personal income tax.

77. Under amendments made to the Tax Code in 2022, parents or persons acting in a parental capacity who are bringing up a child with disabilities under the age of 18 (including adopted and foster children with disabilities) are exempt from income tax.

78. In August 2020, Turkmenistan acceded to the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled of 2013.

79. The Ministry of Education, the Publication Service, the State Television and Radio Broadcasting Committee along with representatives of the Blind and Deaf Society of Turkmenistan are jointly endeavouring to create access for persons with disabilities to the media and printed materials, including through the introduction of sign language interpretation on television for persons who are hard of hearing and deaf and the production of printed materials for persons who are partially or totally blind.

80. On the basis of the Agreement on Cooperation and Interdepartmental Information Exchange with regard to Statistics, an electronic record of persons with disabilities has been devised to provide the following indicators:

- Results of initial examinations of persons with disabilities
- Age of persons with disabilities who have been initially examined
- Level of education of persons with disabilities who have been initially examined (those aged 10 years or older)
- Results of any reassessment of persons with disabilities
- Age of persons with disabilities who have been reassessed
- Level of education of persons with disabilities who have been reassessed (those aged 10 years or older)
- Social group of persons with disabilities who have been certified for the first time
- Social group of persons with disabilities who have been re-certified
- Distribution of pensions and State disability benefits
- Age of pensioners and recipients of State disability benefits

- Education level of pensioners and recipients of State disability benefits (those aged 10 years or older)
- Social group of pensioners and recipients of State disability benefits

81. In 2021, the State Statistics Committee, in cooperation with UNICEF, launched a survey of the situation of children and adults with disabilities who are covered by the social protection system. A sample survey was conducted in all regions of the country and included both urban and rural households.

82. The main purpose of the survey was to assess and analyse means of communication with and by persons with disabilities who were covered by the social protection system in 2021, in accordance with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health for Children and Youth. The information collected is being used to provide high-quality, inclusive services for persons with disabilities.

83. The survey programme includes modules on children's functional abilities, which have been developed by UNICEF and the Washington Group on Disability Statistics and which cover children between the ages of 2 and 17, make it possible to assess a variety of functional difficulties affecting hearing, vision, communication, comprehension, learning, mobility and emotions.

84. The voluntary organizations of Turkmenistan are actively involved in working with persons with disabilities. For example, the voluntary organization Enme has set up a vocational training centre where persons with disabilities are taught computer skills, fashion and textile design, sewing and embroidery, confectionery and arts and crafts.

85. In 2022, the Blind and Deaf Society of Turkmenistan, in partnership with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and with the support of the Embassy of Malaysia in Turkmenistan, conducted an educational programme designed to develop the skills of sign language interpreters from all five regions of Turkmenistan. The aim of the programme was to train highly qualified sign language interpreters to staff the new Sign Language Interpreting Relay Service in Turkmenistan, which will provide video call interpreting services for persons with hearing impairments.

86. One of the priorities of the National Red Crescent Society of Turkmenistan is social protection. During the first half of 2023, 132 persons with disabilities were assisted through the provision of wheelchairs, walking frames and hearing aids.

I. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 21 of the concluding observations

Gender equality

87. The Act on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men of 18 August 2015 lays down State guarantees of gender equality in all spheres of public and social life.

88. Turkmenistan is a member of the Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) for the period 2022–2024 and was a member of the Commission on the Status of Women between 2018 and 2022.

89. A number of new laws have also been adopted to further improve the gender equality legislation of Turkmenistan and bring it into line with the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and other international human rights instruments, including:

- Employment Act
- Act amending the Labour Code;
- Act amending the Criminal Code and enacting it in its new wording
- Act amending the Bar and Advocacy Act
- Act amending the Education Act

- Act amending the National Youth Policy Act
- Act amending the Public Health Protection Act

90. The second National Plan of Action for Gender Equality for the period 2021–2025 was adopted in December 2020.

91. As women are highly educated and very active, they are widely represented in representative and executive bodies at all levels and participate actively in the social and political life of Turkmenistan. Thirty-two (25.6 per cent) of the deputies elected to the seventh parliament are women. The Speaker, the Ombudsman and one of the Deputy Chairs of the Cabinet of Ministers are women. Women make up 28.75 per cent of the members of the Halk Maslahaty (people’s councils) in provinces (*velayatar*), 29.58 per cent of the members of the Halk Maslahaty in districts (*etraplar*) and 28 per cent of the members of the Milli Gengesh, the legislature of Turkmenistan.

92. In the judiciary, 44.6 per cent of the staff are women. In the Ministry of Justice 57.14 per cent of the staff are women. There are more than 1,800 women serving in internal affairs agencies. In the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry, women account for 70.4 per cent of the staff and 58.7 per cent of doctors. Women make up 70 per cent of the total number of employees in the education system.

93. As of 1 January 2023, more than 1 million people are trade union members, over 42 per cent of whom are women; they include women leaders of the National Trade Union Center of Turkmenistan, as well as leaders of trade union associations in districts and towns. Currently, 900,000 people are members of the Youth Organization of Turkmenistan, and 53 per cent of the total number are girls.

94. In March 2019, the Labour Code was amended to remove restrictions on employing women in jobs with harmful or hazardous (or extremely harmful or extremely hazardous) working conditions. Moreover, labour legislation offers certain categories of women safeguards when they work in adverse working conditions. These provisions cover pregnant women and women with children under the age of 18 months and under the age of 3.

95. The Labour Code prohibits the unjustified refusal to conclude an employment contract. Employers, officials or persons authorized by them bear statutory responsibility for unjustified refusal. Refusal to conclude an employment contract is deemed unjustified in respect of women on grounds related to pregnancy, as well as of women with children under the age of 3 (or a child with disabilities under the age of 18).

96. The parliament is currently drafting a new version of the Labour Code. There are plans to include provisions on direct and indirect discrimination.

97. The following tables show the percentage of women who have obtained employment through employment agencies (services) and the level of their economic activity.

Table 4

Information on the percentage of women who applied to employment services

<i>Year</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>
Percentage of the number of persons registered who are women	30.7	38.8	41.4	42.1
Percentage of the number of persons employed who are women	29.6	35.1	36.3	37.3

Table 5

Level of women’s economic activity (as a percentage)

<i>Year</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>
Percentage of the economically active population who are women	43.4	45.8	46.0	48.1

<i>Year</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>
Percentage of the total number of people actually employed who are women	45.8	46.1	46.1	48.2

Table 6
Breakdown of the number of employees of large and medium-sized enterprises by gender (as a percentage)

<i>Year</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>
Men	58.8	58.1	57.5	55.6
Women	41.2	41.9	42.5	44.4

98. The Labour Code guarantees everyone equal remuneration for work of equal value.

99. Payments related to working hours and working conditions have a significant impact on the amount of wages received, including supplementary pay for work in harmful and hazardous conditions, at night, on weekends, non-working holidays and memorial days, for overtime work and other benefits. The principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value applies when women are engaged in work of equal value and at the same level of qualification as men.

100. There has been a significant reduction in the wage gap between women and men in Turkmenistan's economic sectors, as can be seen from the table below. While in 2019 women's wages were 13.7 per cent lower than men's in the economy as a whole, in 2022 the figure worked out at just over 12 per cent.

Table 7
Women's wages as a percentage of men's wages at enterprises, organizations and institutions of all forms of ownership by type of economic activity

<i>Year</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2022</i>
Total	86.3	87.8
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	90.3	89.3
Mining and quarrying	75.7	75.1
Manufacturing (processing industry)	86.0	84.9
Supply of electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning	87.9	87.0
Water supply and treatment, waste management and recovery of secondary raw materials	94.8	96.1
Construction	95.3	83.1
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	85.2	80.3
Transportation and storage of goods	85.1	78.9
Hotels and restaurants	93.5	89.3
Information and communication	91.9	90.4
Financial services and insurance	89.9	87.4
Real estate activities	95.8	94.5
Professional, scientific and technical activities	87.1	90.6
Administrative and support activities	82.9	81.7
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	69.5	70.4
Education	92.7	93.4
Public health and social services	91.4	92.7
Arts, entertainment and recreation	85.9	87.5
Personal services	86.7	83.0

101. Under the Criminal Code which entered into force on 1 January 2023, coercing a person to engage in sexual intercourse, sodomy or other acts of a sexual nature in the workplace or elsewhere by blackmail, threatening to destroy property or using financial or other dependence is punishable by punitive work of up to 2 years or deprivation of liberty for up to 2 years.

102. During the reporting period, judicial officials participated in five events on gender equality and awareness-raising for officials as part of measures to combat all forms of discrimination against women and girls. During the period 2018–2022, 145 members of staff of internal affairs agencies participated in 52 seminars and training sessions on gender equality held in Turkmenistan and abroad. Between 2018 and 2022, 40 representatives of the Youth Organization of Turkmenistan participated in 22 seminars and training sessions on gender equality awareness organized by international organizations.

103. As part of the UNDP project on assistance with the realization of the National Action Plan on Human Rights for the period 2021–2025, which is being carried out in cooperation with the State Institute of Law and Democracy, special courses for civil servants on gender-oriented management are being devised with the participation of international and local experts. The blueprint of the educational course will be digitized and recommended as an educational course for state employees.

104. As part of the national strategy entitled “Healthy Mother – Healthy Child – Healthy Future” covering the period 2021–2025, new teaching materials and methods regarding gender equality are being prepared and developed for use in mainstream schools.

105. The National Institute of Education of Turkmenistan is developing new methods of teaching gender equality in mainstream schools and is studying international experience. The Institute’s specialists are preparing a manual for students of general education establishments entitled “Fundamentals of gender knowledge”, as well as a manual for parents and teachers on gender-responsive pedagogy. A manual on gender-responsive pedagogy for educators is being finalized.

106. The Women’s Union of Turkmenistan, in cooperation with the parliament, regularly organizes information events on the importance of women’s participation in public and political life. These events are organized in all regions of Turkmenistan in the form of meetings and round tables. During the reporting period, 215 events on gender equality were organized.

107. The Women’s Union of Turkmenistan has a Businesswomen’s Centre, which was established to pool the capacities of businesswomen. Branches of the Centre have been established in all provinces. The Centre organizes events and provides methodological, legal and other assistance to women who are planning to set up their own business. During the reporting period, the Centre held 72 events.

108. Every year, the Women’s Union of Turkmenistan organizes the “Woman of the Year” contest which has seven categories. The conditions of the contest help to create a positive image of modern woman leaders and businesswomen in society and promote women’s more active involvement in fostering democratic processes in the country. The nomination of a woman serving in the military or law enforcement system resonates widely in society. The competition helps to overcome gender stereotypes.

109. The Youth Organization of Turkmenistan, in cooperation with the relevant ministries and departments and voluntary organizations, regularly carries out activities aimed at raising awareness among young people of national legislation and international law, including provisions concerning gender equality. These activities are also held in rural areas.

J. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 24 of the concluding observations

Forced labour

110. The cotton industry provides job opportunities in the sectors of agriculture and textiles, as well as in the medical, food processing and other sectors of the economy.

111. Practical steps are being taken to reduce manual labour in cotton harvesting. The widespread use of new generation cotton combine harvesters has reduced manual harvesting rates from 71 per cent in 2015 to 20 per cent in 2022. The amount of farm machinery used in 2022 has increased 25 times over 2016.

112. The section of the National Plan of Action on Human Rights for the period 2021–2025 entitled “Freedom of Labour”, includes measures aimed at:

- Expanding cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO) to prevent forced labour
- Devising measures to prevent the use of forced labour, including through the enforcement of legislation and by monitoring compliance with it
- Ensuring full implementation of programmes to improve employment in Turkmenistan, especially with a view to maximizing the employment of persons with disabilities
- Strengthening legislation prohibiting forced labour

113. State supervision and monitoring of compliance with the provisions of labour legislation is exercised by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, the Turkmenstandartlary Service (the main State standards service) and other national bodies active in the field of labour protection, as well as by local public authorities and local self-government bodies.

114. Trade unions exercise public oversight and supervision of compliance with the provisions of labour legislation through technical and legal labour inspectorates. Despite the absence of official submissions from citizens about the use of forced labour in the sectors of agricultural production and the processing of agricultural products, trade unions carry out monitoring and conduct special courses, training sessions and seminars.

115. During consideration of the implementation of ILO Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105), at the 109th session of the International Labour Conference in 2021, Turkmenistan accepted the recommendation to invite an ILO high-level technical assistance mission. A number of ILO mission visits to Turkmenistan took place between 2022 and 2023.

116. In March 2023, a road map for ILO-Government cooperation for 2023 was adopted. It includes:

- A review of the policy and administrative entity regulating cotton harvesting
- Improved labour inspection
- Promoting full, productive and freely chosen employment in the cotton sector
- Improving cotton production and harvesting
- Devising and improving awareness-raising campaigns
- Promoting social dialogue in the cotton production and processing sectors

117. During the ILO mission in July 2023, a workshop was held with representatives of the relevant ministries and departments and social partners to present experiences, policies and the organizational aspects of a number of labour inspection systems in selected countries.

118. The purpose of the workshop was to identify the key elements of a national action plan to bring the labour inspection system in Turkmenistan into line with ILO standards and principles of labour inspection and global best practices, as well as the next steps which must be taken, including ILO technical support, to strengthen labour inspection and make progress towards the ratification by Turkmenistan of ILO Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129), and ILO Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81).

119. At the same time, the statistical authorities intend to conduct household surveys to make a quantitative analysis of cotton harvesting trends over the last five years. Also in September 2023, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Government of

Turkmenistan and ILO on monitoring working conditions during the cotton harvest in Turkmenistan in 2023.

K. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 26 of the concluding observations

Trade unions

120. The right to form, freely join or refrain from joining a trade union, to participate in trade union activities and to freely withdraw from membership is provided for in the Act on Trade Unions, Their Rights and Guarantees relating to their Activities.

121. All the members of a trade union have equal rights. There is no quantitative restriction on the formation of a trade union in a particular occupation. Obstructing the formation of a trade union, as well as opposition to its lawful activity, is punishable by law.

122. There are 14 independent trade unions in Turkmenistan, established according to the sectoral principle: (1) the Agro-industrial Workers' Union; (2) the Aviation and Communications Workers' Union; (3) the Motor Transport and Road Workers' Union; (4) the State Institutions Workers' Union; (5) the Railway Workers' Union; (6) the Health Workers' Union; (7) the Public Utilities Workers' Union; (8) the Trade Union of Workers in Culture, Sports, Tourism and Social Organizations; (9) the Science and Education Workers' Union, (10) the Gas Workers' Union; (11) the Industrial and Building Workers' Union; (12) the Textile Workers' Union; (13) the Trade and Enterprise Workers' Union; and (14) the Power Workers' Union.

123. Each of these trade unions is an independent body in its own branch. Sectoral trade unions are headed by the Chairs of trade union councils. The Chairs of trade union councils are elected by the trade union conference for a five-year term. Sectoral trade unions have independent staff (specialists).

124. The mechanism for regulating collective labour disputes is provided for in part XVI, chapter 2, of the Labour Code (arts. 367–397).

125. Under article 395 of the Labour Code, the procedure for resolving a collective labour dispute comprises two stages: consideration by a conciliation commission and consideration by a court. Consideration of a collective labour dispute by a conciliation commission is a mandatory stage. None of the parties to a collective labour dispute may refuse to participate in conciliation procedures.

126. A complaint may be lodged with a court against acts by State bodies and voluntary associations, or their officials that overstep their authority or infringe the labour rights and freedoms of citizens.

127. Pursuant to the Act on the Trilateral Commission for the Regulation of Social and Labour Issues of 20 October 2018, these matters are considered at a meeting of the Trilateral Commission set up at the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection.

L. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 28 of the concluding observations

Domestic violence

128. Pursuant to the Act on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (18 August 2015), the State guarantees and ensures equal protection of women and men against domestic violence manifested in the form of physical or psychological pressure or damage (harm) committed by one family member against another.

129. The Family Code provides that one of the objectives of family law is to prevent any form of violence against any member of the family.

130. Under the Act amending the Criminal Code and enacting it in its new wording (17 April 2022), it is a criminal offence to force a person to terminate a pregnancy.

131. The Criminal Code also contains a number of articles related to combating domestic violence, including:

- Article 101, which deals with murder
- Article 111, cruel treatment
- Article 125, abduction of women for the purpose of entering into de facto marital relations
- Article 132, rape
- Article 134, gratification of depraved sexual urges
- Article 135, forcing a person to engage in sexual intercourse
- Article 141, sexual intercourse with a person known to be under 16 years of age
- Article 144, violation of privacy
- Article 160, forced marriage or obstruction of marriage
- Article 161, polygamy

132. Since 2019, concerted efforts have been carried out to explore and establish a system for ensuring an inter-agency response to gender-based violence against women. As part of a study on the prevention of gender-based violence, the Interdepartmental Commission on Compliance with the International Obligations Undertaken by Turkmenistan in the Field of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law and its working group were familiarized with the concept of an inter-agency response to gender-based violence, with the participation of UNFPA in Turkmenistan.

133. An assessment of existing practices to prevent domestic violence against women has been conducted with technical assistance from UNFPA. As a result of the assessment, recommendations have been developed to improve the legislative framework, in line with international instruments, to enhance the capacities and skills of representatives of the health, social protection and law enforcement sectors and to establish coordination mechanisms between these sectors to provide comprehensive assistance to women victims of gender-based violence.

134. Draft standard operating procedures have been developed for police officers and health and social protection workers, with details of the steps needed to provide quality services to women based on respect for human rights, ethics, confidentiality and women's interests. The standard operating procedures were piloted for health workers in 2020 and for police officers and social protection workers in 2021. In 2022, the standard operating procedures were updated to reflect changes to the country's legislative system.

135. In 2020, a sample survey on the health and status of women in the family in Turkmenistan, which focused on data collection and analysis regarding the problem of domestic violence against women, was conducted jointly with the UNFPA office in Turkmenistan. The results of the sample survey were published in August 2022. The national sample survey revealed that 5.4 per cent of women aged 18–59 years who had ever been in a marriage or partnership had experienced physical, sexual or psychological violence from a husband or partner in the last 12 months, and 12 per cent of women had experienced physical or sexual violence from a husband or partner at least once in their lifetime. At some point in their lives, 0.3 per cent of women and girls aged 15 years and older had been subjected to sexual violence by somebody other than an intimate partner (<https://turkmenistan.unfpa.org/en>). This information is included in the sixth report submitted by Turkmenistan under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and in the second voluntary national review of Turkmenistan on progress made towards the Sustainable Development Goals (<https://hlpf.un.org/countries/turkmenistan/voluntary-national-reviews-2023>).

136. A road map for the implementation of the survey recommendations for the period 2022–2025 has been developed, which includes four main areas: (1) improving the legislative framework for the development and adoption of a domestic violence prevention law; (2) building a coordinated system of services to support and protect women victims of

violence; (3) implementing measures to prevent violence against women and all forms of gender discrimination; and (4) collecting and analysing data on the frequency, prevalence and characteristics of gender-based violence within and outside the family.

137. The Information Centre of the Ministry of Internal Affairs continuously collects and analyses statistical data on cases of any form of violence against women, disaggregated by sex, age, nationality and place where the incident occurred, and other relevant units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs keep records of the number of complaints received, investigations conducted and criminal prosecutions brought.

138. With support from UNFPA, the #ErkeklerHem (#MenToo) campaign was launched as part of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign. The #ErkeklerHem campaign engages men and boys in promoting gender equality and combating violence against women and girls at home, at work and in the community.

139. On 16 November 2022, as part of the international campaign, a seminar for journalists on the role of the media in preventing violence against women was held; on 5 December 2022, a round table on the topic “Learning from the experience of creating a national system for responding to violence against women” was held in Ashgabat; and an exhibition of materials on preventing gender-based violence to mark the annual United Nations-supported 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign was held.

M. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 30 of the concluding observations

Poverty

140. The commitment of Turkmenistan to the Sustainable Development Goals has contributed to the creation of a holistic model of sustainable development with a focus on people and improving the well-being of every citizen of the country. Targeted assistance and services for socially vulnerable segments of the population are being introduced. Wages, pensions, grants and State benefits are increased annually by presidential decrees:

- The following types of State benefits have been established in the country:
 - Allowance for temporary loss of capacity for work
 - Maternity leave
 - Childbirth allowance
 - Childcare allowance (regardless of employment status) until the child reaches the age of 3 years
 - Disability allowance (in the event of partial or total loss of capacity for work)
 - State benefit payable to a surviving spouse of a veteran of the Great Patriotic War
 - State social benefits

141. As at 1 January 2023, there were a total of 998,600 pensioners and recipients of State social benefits of all types, including 543,700 pensioners and 454,900 other beneficiaries. Over the period 2015–2022, average monthly pensions and State benefits rose by a factor of 2.2.

142. Veterans of the Great Patriotic War are accorded the following rights and benefits as social protection measures:

- Free water, gas and electricity
- Free central heating, household and other waste removal services and wastewater disposal.

143. Persons with group I disabilities and family members living with them are also entitled to free water, gas, electricity and housing and communal services, which are paid for from the budgets of the relevant authorities.

144. In 2019, the Government of Turkmenistan and the United Nations launched the Joint Programme on Improving the System of Social Protection through the Introduction of Inclusive Quality Community-based Social Services, which was completed in June 2022. The joint programme contributed to the adoption of the Social Services Act of 2021, which defines the legal, administrative and economic framework for social support for certain categories of persons in difficult circumstances and in need of social services.

145. In 2021, a survey on the impact of the global pandemic on the socioeconomic situation of households was conducted in all regions of Turkmenistan, in accordance with ILO recommendations, and a survey on the situation of children and adults with disabilities covered by the social protection system was carried out in order to implement the call to leave no one behind in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals and identify next steps.

146. In November 2021, amendments were made to the Social Protection Code under which State benefits for the birth of a child, childcare and survivor pensions have been increased according to the number of children in families since 1 January 2022. Mothers who have received the honorary title “Ene mähri” are paid an additional amount corresponding to 30 per cent of their pension or State benefits.

N. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 32 of the concluding observations

Access to water

147. In order to achieve the objectives of improving access to drinking water and proper sanitation, a General Programme to Provide Clean Drinking Water for the period 2011–2025 has been adopted, and the Drinking Water Act is in force.

148. The Act guarantees every person a supply of drinking water that meets established quality standards, in quantities corresponding to drinking water consumption standards.

149. Over the last 10 years, Turkmenistan has achieved good progress in terms of access to clean water. In 2010, 82 per cent of the population had access to clean and safe water. In 2020, this figure rose to 95 per cent. The gap in access to clean water between regions in the country has also narrowed.

150. The population is provided with drinking water primarily through access to a centralized water supply. The length of the water mains network was increased from 5,000 km to 7,700 km between 2015 and 2021; this included a 1.3 per cent increase in 2021 compared to 2019.

151. According to data from the sixth round of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, the proportion of the population using safely managed water services has increased significantly, from 82.8 per cent in 2015 and 2016 to 99.9 per cent in 2019.

152. The General Programme to Provide Clean Drinking Water is being implemented as part of a national programme for villages. Water treatment and desalination plants are being built, existing water treatment facilities and water supply systems are being upgraded, and modern technologies are being introduced to promote water conservation, improve the availability of water resources and increase their reserves.

153. In the period 2008–2022, 9,200 km of water supply networks, 1,600 km of sewage networks, 587 wells, 8 water treatment plants and 5 sewage treatment plants were put into operation under the programme. Measures are also regularly taken to locate new deposits of drinking water.

154. A number of projects to improve access to water have been implemented with the assistance of UNDP. In particular, a pump-assisted gravity water system that saves energy and water was constructed to supply water to the city of Kaka; a research and demonstration site for the introduction of modern water-saving technologies in irrigated agriculture was established on a 145 ha plot; and a pilot scheme using renewable energy sources to supply water to settlements in areas distant from centralized energy supply infrastructure was implemented.

155. Pursuant to the Health Code, the State Public Health Service of the Ministry of Health and the Medical Industry continuously monitors the production and consumption of drinking water.

156. Laboratories at the provincial and district levels analyse water for microbiological and chemical composition. State public health inspection of the condition of the drinking water supply covers both urban and rural settlements in accordance with the same procedures.

157. According to the sixth round of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, conducted in 2019 by the State Statistics Committee in collaboration with UNICEF and UNFPA, 99.9 per cent of the population had access to basic drinking water services, including 99.9 per cent of the population in urban areas and 99.8 per cent of the population in rural areas.

158. Some 99.4 per cent of the population used improved sanitation facilities, including 99.4 per cent in urban areas and 99.4 per cent in rural areas.

O. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 34 of the concluding observations

Registration system (*propiska*)

159. The Migration Act provides for the registration of the places of permanent and temporary residence of citizens within the country in order to regulate internal migration processes and ensure the conditions necessary for internal migrants to exercise their rights and freedoms and fulfil their obligations towards other citizens.

160. Every citizen enjoys the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution and by law throughout the country, regardless of whether he or she is registered as having a place of permanent or temporary residence. Not being registered as having a place of permanent or temporary residence may not be invoked as grounds for restricting citizens' rights and freedoms.

161. Under the Employment Act, the State guarantees the right of citizens to free choice of profession, occupation and place of work at a person's discretion and the creation of safe and healthy working conditions, and ensures equal rights and opportunities for everyone in obtaining a profession, employment and remuneration commensurate with the quantity and quality of their work and career advancement, and legal protection against any form of discrimination, unjustified refusal to hire and unlawful dismissal and termination of an employment contract.

162. Through cooperation between employment agencies or services located in all regions of the country, records are kept of persons wishing to work outside their place of initial residence. Thus, the residence registration system is not an obstacle to obtaining employment.

163. In order to regulate labour relations, meet the demand for workers among employers in Ashgabat and improve recruitment practices, a presidential decision of 13 February 2016 approved a procedure for the registration of physical persons entering Ashgabat for the purposes of employment, under which Turkmen citizens, and foreign nationals resident in Turkmenistan and stateless persons resident in the city of Ashgabat for the purposes of employment but without residence permits or registration in Ashgabat, may be employed (or self-employed) after obtaining a work permit from the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection in Ashgabat.

164. Registration of residence (*propiska*) does not restrict entitlement to pensions and social security. Pensions and social security payments are paid at a person's habitual place of residence through cooperation between the regional offices of the Pension Fund of Turkmenistan at the person's permanent place of residence and habitual place of residence on the basis of a written application.

P. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 36 of the concluding observations

Housing and forced evictions

165. The Housing Code establishes the procedure for the confiscation of a plot of land on which a house is located for State or public needs.

166. In the event that residential properties are demolished, the owner, family members living together with him or her and other persons permanently resident there prior to the demolition of the property are, at the owner's discretion, either provided with alternative accommodation in good condition and of equal value or are paid compensation equivalent to the value of the demolished property, household outbuildings and other structures and cultivated areas.

167. The owner may, within the established standards, be granted a plot of land for the construction and maintenance of an individual residential property and paid the value of the demolished property, household outbuildings and other structures and cultivated areas. Pending the construction of an individual residential property, temporary accommodation will be provided through a rental contract for a period not exceeding three years.

168. Pursuant to the Administrative Procedures Act, all persons have the right to appeal to administrative bodies on matters directly related to their rights and legitimate interests, and to make requests and receive information from such bodies. The administrative body is obliged to make appropriate decisions on such appeals or provide information.

Q. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 38 of the concluding observations

Prisoners

169. The National Plan of Action on Human Rights for the period 2021–2025 includes a number of measures for prison system reform:

- Amending legislation in accordance with international standards and the recommendations of the Committee against Torture
- Ensuring that conditions in all prisons are in line with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules)
- Preparing and issuing publications on the rights of prisoners and publishing and disseminating the texts of international human rights treaties

170. Places of detention are constantly monitored by the Penal Correction Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The staff of this unit periodically visit prisoners and look into their health status and conditions of detention.

171. Work has been and continues to be carried out to renovate and modernize detention facilities. During the period 2019–2021, refurbishment and upgrades to buildings and structures were carried out at three institutions in Mary Province, two institutions in Balkan Province and two institutions in Ahal Province.

172. In response to the global spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, a number of preventive measures were taken at the prison facilities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In particular, all persons serving sentences in correctional institutions in Turkmenistan who had no contraindications to immunization were vaccinated three times free of charge.

173. Three meals a day are served in correctional facilities, and every inmate has free access to drinking water. Higher nutritional standards have been set for inmates who are pregnant or breastfeeding, minors and those who are ill or have a category I or category II disability.

174. Supervisory commissions established at the level of local authorities closely monitor compliance with the law by the bodies responsible for the enforcement of penalties. These

commissions include representatives of law enforcement agencies, the parliament, voluntary organizations and the Council on Religion reporting to the Office of the President. The supervisory commissions conduct visits to places of deprivation of liberty in accordance with an annually approved plan. In 2022, there were 12 such visits. Following visits by the commissions, proposals for improving detention conditions are sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

175. Pursuant to the Penalties Enforcement Code, the Ombudsman may visit special institutions without hindrance and without prior notice. During 2018, the Ombudsman visited a correctional institution for minors and a correctional institution for women. In 2019, the Ombudsman visited a special rehabilitation centre and a correctional institution in Tejen and a remand centre in the settlement of Yashlyk in Ahal Province. In 2022, the Ombudsman visited an institution for convicted juveniles run by the Mary Province Police Department and an institution for convicted women prisoners run by the Dashoguz Province Police Department.

176. Medical services have the necessary equipment, facilities and medicines for proper medical care and treatment of patients.

R. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 40 of the concluding observations

Right to education

177. Educational institutions of foreign countries play a crucial role in training the workforce for the innovation economy of Turkmenistan. Appropriate inter-State and inter-university agreements on the training of a professional workforce are concluded.

178. Turkmen citizens follow educational and training courses outside Turkmenistan both on the basis of international agreements and by private arrangement, subject to the regulations on the procedure for the training of Turkmen citizens at secondary and higher vocational colleges of foreign States, approved by a presidential decision of 19 April 2013. These regulations place no restrictions on study outside Turkmenistan.

179. Documents issued in foreign States regarding education, the awarding of academic degrees and the conferring of academic titles are recognized in Turkmenistan in accordance with the law and international agreements to which Turkmenistan is a party. Since 24 May 1996, Turkmenistan has been a party to the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific (Bangkok, 16 December 1983), the Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region (Paris, 21 December 1979) and, since 20 November 2022, the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon, 11 April 1997).

180. The only restrictions on travel abroad are those established under the Migration Act for significant breaches of regulations, but these do not relate to study outside Turkmenistan.

S. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 43 of the concluding observations

Linguistic rights of ethnic minorities

181. Ethnic minorities are guaranteed the right to use and study their native language. The lack of schools offering native-language instruction for small ethnic minorities is attributable to difficulties in finding teachers and teaching materials. It is not prohibited for people to obtain education through out-of-school courses and all educational activities are subject to licensing by the Ministry of Education. There have been no requests in recent years for the introduction of courses teaching any of the ethnic minority languages.

182. If parents so wish, the Ministry of Education helps them to teach their children their native language by providing them with textbooks in Uzbek and Kazakh kept in store. If

parents ask for it, assistance may be provided for the study of the native language through international cooperation with the education systems of other States.

183. The year 2023 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the country's membership of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Cooperation with UNESCO is actively being expanded.

184. Turkmenistan has a National Commission for UNESCO (as established by a presidential decision of 23 October 2020).

185. UNESCO chairs have been established at two Turkmen institutions of higher education: Magtymguly Turkmen State University and the Seyitnazar Seidi Turkmen State Pedagogical Institute.

186. A number of general education schools in the country are included in the UNESCO Associated Schools Network. The UNESCO clubs Languages of Peace, Culture of Peace and Environmental Protection – An Important Concept for Sustainable Development were also opened at three institutions of higher education in the 2022/23 academic year.

T. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 45 of the concluding observations

Access to the Internet

187. The Internet Development and Internet Service Legal Regulation Act defines the principles of law regulating matters related to development of the Internet and sets out the legal framework for the provision of Internet services in the country.

188. In order to develop the country's telecommunication systems, contracts have been signed for development of the Internet and mobile networks financed by investment funds from the Islamic Development Bank, and telecommunication systems are being improved.

189. Impetus for the development of telecommunication technologies has been provided by the launch of the first national communications satellite, TurkmenÄlem 52°E, which has significantly expanded the range of modern services provided in the broadcasting industry and in the communications and Internet sectors.

190. In order to make the Internet widely available to the public, the prices of publicly available Internet services in the country are gradually being reduced. There are now more than 3 million Internet users in Turkmenistan, which is more than 20 per cent higher than in 2019. With the expansion of the mobile network in the country, a broadband Internet access system has been established through the introduction of advanced technologies such as the third generation Universal Mobile Telephone System (3G UMTS) in all settlements and the fourth generation long-term evolution (4G LTE) mobile communications standard in provincial and district centres.

191. Users of online banking more than doubled between 2017 and 2022. As at 1 January 2023, more than 900,000 online banking customers were registered.

192. A programme of work aimed at increasing the efficiency of all sectors of the national economy and social services through the extensive use of information technology is being carried out in Turkmenistan to achieve a transition to a digital economy.

193. A programme to digitalize the science sector in the period 2020–2025 is being carried out and a policy framework for the development of the digital economy in the period 2019–2025 is being implemented.

194. To improve the system of electronic services, a unified public services portal has been created.

U. Follow-up information relating to paragraphs 46–48 of the concluding observations

Other recommendations

195. During the reporting period, parliamentary decisions and laws were adopted by which the following action was taken:

- Accession to the Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144) of the International Labour Organization (2019)
- Accession to the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled (2020)
- Accession to the Convention against Discrimination in Education (2021)
- Ratification of the Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122) (2021)
- Ratification of the Instrument for the Amendment of the Constitution of the International Labour Organization (2022)
- Accession to the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region (2022)

196. Turkmenistan is working steadily to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Covenant, and also the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure. Relevant measures have been included in the National Plan of Action on Human Rights for the period 2021–2025.

197. In particular, the country's domestic law is being checked for consistency with the provisions of the aforementioned international instruments. In addition, provisions of those instruments are being analysed and studied, along with the arrangements for accession to them. To that end, informational workshops are being held for members of parliament and representatives of other State entities, in cooperation with international organizations.

198. In 2023, Turkmenistan submitted its second voluntary national review on progress made towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The voluntary national review provides information on the realization of a range of rights enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (<https://hlpf.un.org/countries/turkmenistan/voluntary-national-reviews-2023>).