



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Combined sixth and seventh periodic reports submitted by Bhutan under article 44 of the Convention, due in 2023^{*}, ^{**}

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

** The annex to the present document may be accessed from the web page of the Committee.



List of abbreviations

AFHS	Adolescent Friendly Health Services
BNLI	Bhutan National Legal Institute
CAA	Child Adoption Act of Bhutan 2012
CBSS	Community-Based Support System
CCPA	Child Care and Protection Act of Bhutan 2011
CIDC	Children in Difficult Circumstances
CICL	Children in Conflict with the Law
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSE	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DVPA	Domestic Violence Prevention Act
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
EISR	Early Identification and Safe Referral
EVAC	End Violence Against Children
FYP	Five Year Plan
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GCFP	Gender and Child Focal Point
JDWNRH	Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital
MCH	Mother and Child Health
MoESD	Ministry of Education and Skills Development
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoICE	Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment
NCP	National Child Policy
NCWC	National Commission for Women and Children
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGEP	National Gender Equality Policy
NL	Nazhoen Lamtoen
NPPD	National Policy for Persons with Disabilities
OAG	Office of the Attorney General
PCB	Penal Code of Bhutan 2004 and (amendment) 2011
PHC	Primary Health Centre
PwD	Persons with Disabilities
RBP	Royal Bhutan Police
RCJ	Royal Court of Justice
RENEW	Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women
RGoB	Royal Government of Bhutan
SoP	Standard Operating Procedure
TIP	Trafficking in Persons

UNTOC	United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime
VAC	Violence Against Children
WCPU/D	Women and Child Protection Unit/Desk

I. Introduction

1. Bhutan extends appreciation for this opportunity to present the State Response to the List of Issues Prior to Reporting under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This report covers the period spanning June 2017 to January 2023 and builds on the third to fifth periodic report submitted on May 17–18, 2017. The preparation of the responses is led by the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) in consultation with various stakeholders including Government Agencies, Armed Forces, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Private Sector, Media and Academia. Two consultative workshops, cluster meetings and numerous bilateral meetings were conducted in preparing this report.

II. New developments

Reply to paragraph 2 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting (CRC/BTN/QPR/6-7)

2. Education Reform: The education sector is being reformed in keeping with the Royal Decree of December 2020 to embrace a new vision for 21st century teaching and learning, which emphasises critical thinking, creativity, digital literacy, and STEM competency. Due focus is also given to the need of differently abled children to realise their full potential.

3. Mental Health: Recognising mental health as a growing issue of concern in the country, The PEMA was instituted in June 2022 under the compassionate and benevolent guidance of Her Majesty The Queen, as a nodal agency for mental health. The PEMA aspires to create a society that promotes the well-being of all supported by enabling mental health policies and programs, transformative and multisectoral partnerships, a proactive service delivery network and providing treatment, rehabilitation and aftercare services for substance users to increase access to evidence-based services. The PEMA caters services and programs through a life-course approach to all, including children and vulnerable groups in continuum of care through prevention, response and restorative and rehabilitative approaches. The PEMA Center, a 60-bedded hospital scheduled to be operational by 2026, will provide mental health care services and have a dedicated children and family ward. The dedicated 10 bedded ward will provide specialized care to children and adolescents facing mental health challenges. Presently, the Ministry of Health (MoH) has introduced a Child and Family Ward consisting of four beds to cater to the specific mental health needs of children and adolescent.

4. Legal and Policy Framework: The Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) endorsed the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (NPPD) in 2019. This policy includes special considerations for accessibility to education, disaster protection and health services for children with disabilities, as well as the assurance of parental and caregiver participation in the care and decision-making process related to children with disabilities.

5. The approval of the National Sanitation and Hygiene Policy in 2020 ensures universal access to safe water, improved sanitation, and hygiene. This policy clearly delegates among relevant agencies the responsibility of strengthening capacities, sustainable sanitation, hygiene and clean water systems to achieve universal coverage for all.

6. In 2020, the MoH adopted the acceleration of mother and child health policy (AMCHP) to improve healthcare outcomes of mothers and children through comprehensive mother and child intervention including conditional cash transfers for most at risk women. AMCHP would help build a platform to reach and benefit the poor and vulnerable women, with initiatives beyond health and nutrition; it would engage women to improve their financial literacy through managing finances, access to banking services, and digital literacy through use of information technology for social and behavior change communications (SBCC).

7. The National Youth Policy of 2011 has been revised through a consultative process where young people were provided adequate space to raise their voices in reforming the policy, and an action plan developed. The revision has reinvigorated the policy and ensured a more coordinated approach to the development of Bhutanese youth.

8. The National Child Policy (NCP), once adopted, will provide an overall framework to uphold and protect the rights and dignity of children. During its formulation, children were engaged in the consultations. The NCWC is also coordinating an Action Plan to establish targets, secure resources, set timeframes, and designate stakeholder responsibilities to implement the policy.

9. In October 2022, the Bhutan National Legal Institute (BNLI) established the Legal Aid Center to make legal advice, assistance and representation available to victims and vulnerable individuals, including children.

Reply to paragraph 2 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

10. The MoH adopted an Interim Operational Guideline to ensure uninterrupted delivery of essential maternal and child health services, including immunisation and growth monitoring, even during lockdowns. Relevant medical professionals including paediatricians, obstetricians and gynaecologists were stationed in red zones (high-risk areas) to provide outreach and medical services such as ultrasonography, dental and vision services. This ensured that children, pregnant mothers, and people with special needs received appropriate care during the pandemic. To address psychosocial needs, a National Mental Health Response Team (NMHRT) was instituted, led by Psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. According to the independent assessment conducted by the WHO, Bhutan is among few countries where there was minimal service disruption.

11. Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) based healthcare services such as remote cardiotocography were also introduced to provide critical services to pregnant mothers. Community health workers were engaged to advocate for COVID-19 prevention with a particular focus on the needs and vulnerabilities of infants, children and women. Targeted advocacy materials were developed on COVID-19 prevention and mental health for women and children. To contain the spread of COVID-19, Bhutan rapidly rolled out COVID-19 vaccines for 12 to 17-year-olds through a school-based vaccination strategy followed by booster doses covering 92% of the age group in March 2022.¹ More than 97% of children aged 5 to 11 years also received the vaccine.

12. To mitigate schooling disruptions, the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD) initiated online teaching through social media, broadcasted daily lessons via TV and radio, developed Self-Instructional Materials and provided Psychosocial Support (PSS) through Sherig counselling services. The initiatives were found effective with around 75% reporting that they learned and enjoyed the sessions. To expand access and make the Internet affordable for students from economically disadvantaged families, telecom companies introduced data packages with 60% additional data for students.²

13. To enable vulnerable students to participate in education during the pandemic, all 744 students with disabilities were provided with either a smartphone or a tablet. The initiative was supported by the COVID-19 accelerated fund. The grade X and XII board examinations were safely and successfully held during lockdowns by relocating students to safe zones, setting up examination centres in areas of residence, and through self-containment mode for boarding schools.

14. A National Resilience Fund set up in April 2020, to support people impacted by the pandemic, disbursed Nu. 4,163.33 million to 54,783 individuals from April 14, 2020, till February 2022, including monthly child support to around 7,000 children. Ration support was also provided to 1,033 households between January 16 and March 20, 2022. A special

¹ Bhutan rapidly rolled out Pfizer and Moderna vaccines for 12 to 17-year-olds through a school-based vaccination strategy followed by booster doses: 78.6% of adolescents aged 12-17 years were vaccinated with the first dose by August 2021, 92.8% with second dose by November 2021, and 79.7% with booster (third) dose by March 2022.

² BTL initiated 5 data packages and TCell introduced 3 data packages with 60% additional data for students.

kidu³ of Nu. 84.04 million was also granted to 2,555 households in Phuentsholing (red-zone) and Nu. 17.03 million to 675 Bhutanese working abroad in the Gulf countries in September 2020.

15. The NCWC developed and implemented the Gender and Child Protection Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan during the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan prevented and responded to gender and child protection issues particularly violence against women and children. The interventions covered all aspects of protection including enforcement of existing Standard Operating Procedure (SoP), clear protocols to respond to family separation and other protection issues, and awareness on stigma and social exclusion, which were implemented by all relevant government agencies and CSOs collectively. On the command of Her Majesty The Queen, the PEMA established temporary shelters in all 20 districts to provide a safe space for survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and other forms of violence. In addition, The PEMA also provided services to people with mental health issues.

16. Safe spaces for women and girls were also established in 7 districts by Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women (RENEW)- an NGO supporting women survivors.⁴ The safe space provided holistic prevention and intervention services such as livelihood skills training, case management, psychosocial support, legal services and temporary shelter to the survivors and vulnerable people. The safe space offers a platform to socialise and re-build their social networks and also provides relevant skills and multi-sectoral GBV response services. Since inception, the centres have reached out and sensitised more than 10,943 people including 5,939 children.⁵ A total of 243 beneficiaries have been supported since its establishment.⁶

17. NCWC's Woman and Child Helpline, 1098 launched in 2018 as an important component of the protection system for women and children,¹⁰ was further strengthened during the pandemic with additional resources and supported 33,000 women and children with psychosocial first aid services, legal advice, case referrals such as medical, shelter and other immediate support during the lockdown. The 1010 Help Desk was launched to connect people with service providers and received over 10,000 calls a day, on an average, during lockdowns. On the command of Her Majesty The Queen, 1010 provided 24/7 services as a helpline for domestic violence during the lockdown. The PEMA also provided tele-consultation and mental health support services to people experiencing stress, anxiety, domestic violence, suicidal behaviours, and withdrawal from substance use. Healthcare providers were also trained on response procedures to GBV focusing on early identification, case management, counselling and referral.

Reply to paragraph 2 (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

18. Bhutan is undergoing a major transformation to prepare the country and its people for the opportunities and challenges of the 21st century. The transformation will bring about improved public service delivery, resource efficiency and better coordination within government agencies.

19. In line with the transformation initiatives, the 13th Plan (2024–2029) is being framed over a 10-year perspective with medium and long-term goals. National priorities and Key Performance Indicators (KPI) will be clustered into specific economic, social, governance and security objectives for a “Developed Bhutan” by 2034.

³ Kidu which is generally referred to wellbeing of the people is traditionally a Royal Prerogative and enshrined in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan as a fundamental responsibility of His Majesty the King.

⁴ Paro, Bumthang, Tsirang, Punakha, Chhukha, Samtse and Sarpang Dzongkhag.

⁵ Male 1772, Female 3232, Boys 2523 and Girls 3416.

⁶ 51 (M: 3, F: 48) were physical abuse, 13 sexual (M: 2, F: 11) emotional 93 (M: 23, F: 70), economic 21 (M: 2, F: 19) and non GBV in nature 65 (M: 18, F: 47).

Reply to paragraph 3 of the list of issues prior to reporting

20. The NCP once approved, will take a rights-based approach focusing on the principles of the rights of the child. Investing in the efficient implementation of these principles will improve the well-being of children. Furthermore, child rights perspectives in the sector policies, plans and programs are strengthened through strong coordination and collaboration amongst agencies including CSOs, monastic institutions and the private sector. The DEWA dashboard (www.dewa.gov.bt), which is an integrated dashboard to monitor Gross National Happiness (GNH) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), and development planning in Bhutan, publishes and updates key development indicators periodically. All strategic action plans are assessed to ensure that gaps and issues are addressed within the existing system.

II. Rights under the Convention and the Optional Protocols thereto

Reply to paragraph 4 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

21. The Child Care and Protection Act (CCPA) provides the legal framework to promote rights and protect children in Bhutan. To identify gaps and challenges in the principles and implementation of CCPA, NCWC conducted a comprehensive assessment of the Act. Recommendations to amend the Act and implementation modalities will be made to the government.

22. To further strengthen and supplement the current legal framework, Bhutan also adopted the National Action Plan for Child Well-being and Protection 2019-2023. The action plan strengthened the protection system through the development of critical SOP, guidelines and manuals related to case management, alternative care, child justice and child rights-based programmes and activities to ensure the implementation of the principles and provisions of the CRC.

Reply to paragraph 4 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

23. In 2018, the National Law Review Taskforce completed the review of legislations and submitted the findings and recommendations to the Parliament and other stakeholders. The review identified laws with conflicting provisions; laws that need consolidation; and the need for new laws. In depth consultations were carried out with all stakeholders including the Human Rights Committee and the Women, Children & Youth Committee of the National Assembly and, the Social and Cultural Affairs Committee of the National Council.

24. The task force recommended 29 Acts for Amendment, 15 Acts for total Repeal, 8 Acts for Consolidation, and 8 New Acts for legislation. Specific recommendations related to women and children were amendment of Section 203 & 204 of the Penal Code of Bhutan, by including factors attributing to child molestation and increasing the penal offence grading, and amendment of Section 154 of the PCB related to Trafficking in Persons (TIP), in line with UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons and the CCPA. The Penal Code of Bhutan Amendment Bill 2019 was passed with the inclusion of a new section on child molestation specifying acts that constitute molestation. The offence was graded as a fourth-degree felony along with compensatory damages to be determined by the court. Similarly, Section 154 of the Penal Code was amended in 2021.

Reply to paragraph 5 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

25. The NCWC evaluated the National Plan of Action for Child Protection of the 11th Five Year Plan (FYP) (2013–2018) to assess its impact, challenges, and lessons learnt. The review suggests that the effort of NCWC, government agencies, development partners and the CSOs including private individuals contributed significantly towards protecting the rights of the child from discrimination and exploitation. A strategic plan was developed for

implementation in the 12th FYP (2019-2023) based on lessons learnt from the implementation of the national plan. The new strategy provided a framework for the ongoing process of building an effective child protection system and also integrated a child rights-based approach. NCWC widely disseminated the strategy to government agencies, CSOs, Local Government (LG), and their partners including private individuals to clarify and account for the responsibilities for upholding children's rights and influence policymakers to integrate the strategy into their plans and programmes.

Reply to paragraph 5 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

26. An update on NCP is provided in response to para 2(a). The policy is being deliberated by the RGoB and it is expected to be approved soon. The revised Youth Policy has been submitted to the RGoB for approval. The review of the policy was conducted through a series of consultations with stakeholders including youth. Youth participated in the review process leading discussions with peers, gathering data, and providing recommendations.

27. NCWC is designated as the lead agency for implementing NCP and the MoESD is designated as the agency for implementing the Youth Policy. Both policies recognize the need for cooperative expression of all stakeholders concerned with child and youth development in Bhutan.

Reply to paragraph 5 (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

28. The NCWC is entrusted with the responsibility to coordinate and monitor activities related to women and child rights, formulate, review and recommend legislations and policies from children's perspective, monitor and evaluate the Government, CSOs, private and other relevant agencies including accreditation, reporting to treaty bodies and developing standards, guidelines and procedures, and implement child rights-based programs.

29. In addition, the Women and Children Welfare Committee at the national level and D/TWCC were established across all 20 districts and four municipalities in 2019. To support the committees, dedicated Child Focal Points have been appointed in all ministries, CSOs, districts and municipalities. Their responsibilities include protecting children, ensuring child response plans and budgets, and providing support to children in need of care and protection. Further, with the growing issue of mental health, including the well-being of children, young people and women, the PEMA will cater services to children who need care and protection and also manage child protection and GBV cases.

30. The operation of the commission and the secretariat is supported by the government with adequate infrastructure, human resources, and financial resources. The resources of the government are complemented by support from development partners and other agencies in Bhutan. Further, with the growing issue of mental health, The PEMA has an important role to play particularly in ensuring the well-being of children, young people and women as mentioned above in para 2(a).

Reply to paragraph 6 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

31. The Ministry of Finance follows a bottom-up approach to budgeting with priorities defined by agencies proposing the budget. The overall budget allocated to gender equality and social inclusion including children and vulnerable groups increased from Nu. 531.2 million in FY 2019–2020 to Nu. 679.9 million in FY 2022–2023. The budget for child protection and social protection measures were allocated to the MoESD, *Dratshang Lhentshog*,⁷ MoH, Royal Bhutan Police (RBP), Royal Court of Justice (RCJ) and NCWC. In FY 2021–2022, a total of Nu. 22.75 million was allocated to *Dratshang Lhentshog* to strengthen child protection, training and enhancing child protection networks among monastic institutions. The budget also supported strengthening child protection responses to

⁷ Commission for Monastic Affairs of Bhutan.

COVID-19 in monastic institutions and nunneries. The budgetary allocation to MoESD focused on enhancing the current Special Needs Education such as the development of textbooks for children with disabilities, training of teachers, therapy rooms and advocacy programmes. In addition, Nu. 8.25 million was allocated to school counselling programmes to provide PSS and skills development in schools. The budget for child protection and social protection programmes was also allocated to NCWC and other agencies. With the establishment of The PEMA, the Royal Government of Bhutan has increased resource allocation by over thirty folds, aiming to consolidate and coordinate efforts in mental health promotion, prevention of mental disorders, and the enhancement of mental health services, including infrastructures. With an increased focus on gender equality, social inclusion, child well-being, the RGoB is committed to increasing the resource allocation to these sectors.

Reply to paragraph 6 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

32. Bhutan adopted Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting (GRPB) in 2016. Since the adoption, the planning and budget framework has included children's perspectives such as maternal and child health and violence against women and children. While Bhutan is yet to adopt a specific budgetary framework that incorporates child rights into state budgeting, the current budget allocation includes resources for children in difficult circumstances (CIDC) and children with disabilities, and in creating a conducive environment for children that is free from harm and violence.

33. While the government budget and accounting system has not directly incorporated a system to track allocation, utilisation and the effects of budget to a particular sector or group, the system provides access to data at the activity level by different agencies. The tracking system at the activity level also allows analysis of public finance and public budget. In 2022, the Ministry of Finance and MoESD started the development of a budget brief for the education sector to track the implementation in the education sector. Based on the experiences of the Gender Responsive Budgeting and the capacity of officials, Bhutan will consider initiating Child Responsive Budgeting.

Reply to paragraph 6 (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

34. The Public Finance Management Reform Strategy 2017-2021 highlighted the need for fiscal transparency to improve accountability and government performance by combining transparency with public participation. This is expected to enable children and CSOs to contribute ideas and information on the public sector and partner with stakeholders in decision-making when implementing public policy. Bhutan continues to make consistent efforts to engage the public, particularly the beneficiaries in policy formulation and programme development. For instance, the review of the National Youth Policy engaged youths in the consultation process to ensure their views were incorporated. Similarly, persons with disabilities and CSOs representing and serving the group participated in the drafting of the NPPD. Further, the *Gewog Tshogde*⁸ ensures that concerns and issues identified at the grassroots level are addressed through local government plans and programs. For instance, Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) centres are established according to the needs of the people in the village. Further, NCWC and partners have been advocating for child friendly local governance, focusing on participation of children and young people in the planning and budgeting process as key interventions.

Reply to paragraph 7 of the list of issues prior to reporting

35. The National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan (NSB) conducts census and periodic nationwide surveys to estimate poverty, employment, disability and other indicators of national importance. A number of independent surveys and studies are also carried out regularly such as the National Health Survey, COVID19 Impact assessment of women and

⁸ Gewog Tshogde is the highest decision-making body in the Gewog or Block composed of elected local leaders.

children and the Living Standard Survey, which provide key information on child protection issues.

36. Information on The DEWA dashboard is provided in response to para 3 (a).

37. Law enforcement, government agencies, and CSOs engaged in the promotion of children's rights and protection maintain respective databases. For instance, the RBP has started maintaining disaggregated data on all penal offenses, including Violence against Children (VAC), sexual exploitation, and child neglect which is published annually; the Department of Law and Order (DLO) maintains data on criminal charges of trafficking; the MoESD has also revamped the EMIS; the Dratshang Lhentshog is developing the Monastic information management system; The PEMA is developing the integrated mental health information system; the MoH maintains data on disability and health indicators; and CSOs maintain databases on beneficiaries.

38. The NCWC also developed a Child Indicator Handbook in 2019 to capture key indicators on child protection and well-being. The handbook helps relevant agencies to design, develop and implement programmes and allocate adequate resources to achieve it.

Reply to paragraph 8 of the list of issues prior to reporting

39. The NCWC is the national mechanism for coordination, monitoring and promotion, and protection of the rights of women and children. The Commission has ten members including two cabinet ministers, representatives of law enforcement, judiciary, health, and education sectors, and religious organisation, CSO and private sector. It is mandated to oversee the implementation of laws and policies for women and children, as well as oversee implementation of treaty obligations arising within the framework of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the rights of the child (CRC) and its optional protocols. The NCWC also is responsible for developing standards, guidelines and procedures for implementing child rights-based programs.

40. Further, the NCWC has created a forum for receiving and investigating reports on the violations of the rights of children and women. It engages other stakeholders in reviewing policies/actions/legislations pertaining to women and children and makes recommendations to the Government to improve their situation.

Reply to paragraph 9 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

41. The MoESD's Standard for Inclusive Education requires all staff and students to be oriented on the CRC. The standard encourages schools to institute professional development for staff, learning opportunities for students and conduct workshops or activities for community engagement annually to enhance awareness of the convention and its optional protocols.

42. A series of trainings have been carried out since 2017 based on the "Young Partners in Change" training manual which seeks to prevent and respond to VAC. Developed by five implementing partners, the training content builds a conceptual understanding of child rights, child protection, children's participation and violence. It also prepares youth through the provision of skills and methods to work individually and collectively as key partners in the initiative to end VAC. The tool provides information and guidance on several methods that can be used by young people in initiatives against violence. The training package consists of a manual and pocketbook which have been translated into Dzongkha.⁹ More than 10,000 children including monks and nuns have been trained as young partners in change. In addition, awareness programs on sexual and reproductive health are carried out routinely in schools spearheaded by the school health coordinators, school health clubs, and school guidance counsellors.¹⁰

⁹ Dzongkha is the national language of Bhutan.

¹⁰ Source: <https://www.mfa.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Bhutan-UPR-Third-Cycle-2019.pdf>.

43. The NCWC in partnership with 22 agencies including central government agencies, development partners, monastic institutions, civil society organisations, local governments, the media and other stakeholders, launched the End Violence Against Children (EVAC) campaign in July 2022 in Thimphu, Samtse, and Trashigang districts. It was complemented by a nation-wide online campaign through print, broadcast and social media. More than 320,000 people were sensitised on preventing violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect through the “Our Child; Our Wealth” campaign. NCWC is evaluating the effectiveness of the campaign, which is anticipated to conclude in 2024.

44. The Child Care and Protection Office (CCPO) of the Dratshang Lhentshög and the Bhutan Nuns Foundation train teachers from monasteries and nunneries on child rights and child protection such as early identification and safe referral (EISR), child participation, positive approach to discipline training, ending VAC and child protection case management. In 2021 the CCPO, supported by NCWC, trained teachers from monastic institutions and nunneries in all 20 districts. Similar initiatives were also implemented in private monastic institutions and nunneries. For instance, 210 teachers and nuns were trained on child protection and their rights.

Reply to paragraph 9 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

45. In 2021, the NCWC in collaboration with Bhutan Media Foundation conducted training on Media Guidelines for Reporting on Women and Children with a specific focus on child protection and child rights.

46. The Judiciary continues to invest in the development of the child justice system in Bhutan and develop the capacity of the judges and bench clerks in the protection of children’s rights. After the establishment of the Family and Child bench in Thimphu in 2017, the Judiciary conducted training for all Sub-district Court judges and bench clerks in court procedures for child justice. It supported study visits of its judges to familiarise them with exemplary child justice systems and courtrooms. It has also conducted training for all judges in 2021 to deepen their understanding of child psychology.

47. The MoH conducts training and orientation for all healthcare workers in child and youth friendly health services. Orientation of healthcare workers are conducted utilising the existing World Health Organization (WHO) training package which has been adapted to the Bhutanese context. The package focuses on children and the environmental exposure and its risk, and reproductive health.

Reply to paragraph 9 (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

48. The values and principles of GNH and other life skills are included in the education system by either directly incorporating or infusing it in the curricula. All schools including United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Clubs and UNESCO ASPnet Schools promote human rights education as part of the educating for GNH concept. Further, subjects such as civics and social studies covers topics on fundamental rights, universal values and human rights. All schools have also incorporated Global Citizenship Education within the curriculum which includes topics such as domestic violence, cyberbullying, child trafficking, abortion and suicide. Further, the curriculum also includes sexual and reproductive health education, and life skills education. These programs are implemented in all schools across the country. The BNLI established Law Clubs in 48 Schools. The Clubs provide legal education to children on the rights of children, children in conflict with the law(CICL), drug abuse, sexual harassment and other emerging human dignity and rights-based issues.

Reply to paragraph 10 of the list of issues prior to reporting

49. Recognizing the importance of systematic engagement with CSOs for effective implementation of the principles and provisions of the CRC, the NCWC has been partnering and actively engaging with CSOs in implementing programmes to promote and protect the

rights of the child. A comprehensive capacity of government agencies and CSOs working on women and children was conducted in 2021. The assessment gauged technical, administrative, managerial and financial capacity of CSOs working in the field of women and children. It was found that the technical capacity of CSOs is lagging in areas of strategic planning and fund mobilisation.

50. To further strengthen coordination with and between CSOs working to prevent and respond to violence against women and children, the National Action and Coordinating Group (NACG) was established in 2013 comprising 8 CSOs and UNICEF. The NACG aims to build strong collaboration and support amongst members and accelerate the implementation of the South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children. The group also provides a platform to network, develop capacities, generate and disseminate knowledge, and strengthen monitoring and reporting. To fill funding gaps, NCWC also provides small grants annually to CSOs operating shelters for women and children survivors of violence and to those who have come in conflict with the law.

51. The NCWC regularly engages all stakeholders in developing and implementing plans and programmes. For instance, in 2022 NCWC initiated a collaborative effort with 22 agencies including government agencies, development partners, monastic institutions, CSOs, local governments, the media and other stakeholders to rollout a multisectoral Social and Behavioural Change (SBC) campaign to address VAC. CSOs played a significant role in the rollout of the campaign leveraging their community reach. The NCWC also ensures that the CSO partners are part of the consultation process in formulation and review of legislation, policies, guidelines, standards and SOPs. Under the UN sustainable development partnership framework, NCWC ensures that the CSOs priorities and programmes receive resource allocation annually.

Reply to paragraph 11 of the list of issues prior to reporting

52. Employment in Bhutan is governed by the Labour and Employment Act of Bhutan 2007 (LEA). Most provisions under the LEA are aligned with international standards and contains provisions on prevention of child labour and exploitation. Labour Inspectors regularly make unannounced visits to workplaces to inspect the work conditions, including businesses operating in the tourism and education sector. Hotels and other businesses in the tourism sector are also monitored by the Department of Tourism to ensure compliance with all national standards including employment conditions. Similarly, private schools in Bhutan are monitored by MoESD.

53. The creche modality was formulated in 2019 with MoESD identified to take the lead coordinating role in the establishment of public and private creches, MoH to look at health aspects and the NCWC to continue supporting establishment of creches to create a conducive environment for all working women and ensure that children are provided with the right environment to thrive. Currently, there are 27 creches established across the country.

Reply to paragraph 12 of the list of issues prior to reporting

54. The 74th Session of the National Assembly deliberated on the Marriage Act of 1980 and subsequently a Resolution was passed amending the minimum age of marriage for girls to 18 years. The Dzongkha text of the Marriage Act 1980 duly records this amendment.

55. Pursuant to the Marriage Act of Bhutan and its amendment thereof, marriages below 18 years are prohibited. The Royal Courts of Justice strictly ensures that applicants for marriage certificates are of 18 years of age and any marriage below the prescribed age is not recognized to be lawful. Further, the Penal Code of Bhutan 2004 (PCB) grades any sexual intercourse with a child below 18 years as rape and a felony of third degree.

Reply to paragraph 13 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

56. Article 7(15) of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan ensures that ‘all persons are equal before the law and are entitled to equal and effective protection of the law and shall not be discriminated against on the grounds of race, sex, language, religion, politics or other status.’ Further, Article 9 of the Constitution states ‘the State shall endeavour to take appropriate measures to ensure that children are protected against all forms of discrimination and exploitation including trafficking, prostitution, abuse, violence, degrading treatment and economic exploitation.’ Particularly for children, the CCPA 2011 provides the legal framework to promote rights and protect children from discrimination in Bhutan. Chapter 2, Section 4 of the CCPA emphasises that “a child shall be treated fairly and equally with respect and dignity and shall not be discriminated against on the grounds of race, sex, language, religion, political or other status”.

57. NCWC monitors compliance with the Act and also provides advice and recommendations based on assessments to those who encounter discrimination to enable them to exercise their rights. NCWC in collaboration with relevant stakeholders assess, investigate and refer cases to RBP, health, CSOs and to the RCJ. Since 2017, NCWC has referred more than 1,100 cases.

58. The BNLI established the Legal Aid Center in October 2022 as the nodal agency for legal aid services. The Center has continually widened the scope for child right based legal aid services to ensure that Children in Conflict with Law and in Difficult Circumstances are heard and represented. This ensures child-focused legal aid services in Bhutan.

59. The *Jigme Singye Wangchuck* Law School is conducting research on child justice and also developing awareness materials to be used in the courts for children accessing justice services.

Reply to paragraph 13 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

60. Please refer to the response in para 13(a). In addition, measures such as review of legal and policy framework, guidelines and standards, advocacy and training on child rights and protection, have been taken to ensure that children are not discriminated against in line with article 2 of the CRC.

61. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan Article 9 (16) guarantees free education to all children of school going age up to 10th standard. Article 7(21) states that the State shall provide free access to basic public health services in both modern and traditional medicines. In accordance with the Constitution, all people residing in Bhutan are guaranteed access to free health and education.

62. The Jigme Singye Wangchuck Law School’s Human Dignity Clinic, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, developed an advocacy toolkit on Legal Proceedings: Access to Justice for Persons with Disability 2021, which provides PwD with simplified information on how to navigate the justice system. It is translated into *Dzongkha* and is in the process of being made accessible in other formats such as audio-visual and braille. It specifically contains a know your rights for CICL to ensure that children with disabilities have equal access to justice. Two rounds of advocacy have been conducted, taking the street law approach.

63. The National Gender Equality Policy (NGEP) of 2020 is under review to incorporate and guarantee the rights of the LGBT+ population.

Reply to paragraph 14 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

64. The Marriage Act of Bhutan 1980 in its amendment in 2009 mandates the RCJ to determine custody based on certain conditions and circumstances, which includes the best interest of the child. Mothers have the right to custody of the child under the age of 9, unless the court finds compelling reasons to do otherwise in the best interest of the child. The NCWC provides expert opinion to the court when asked to determine the best interest of the child for

custodial rights. The NCWC has provided more than 30 expert views based on the assessment conducted for child custody to the RCJ.

Reply to paragraph 14 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

65. Bhutan prioritises protecting the rights of the child and ensuring that their best interests are taken as a primary consideration. The primary objective of the CCPA as stated in Section 15 of the Act is, “to set up a system of administration of child justice that is in the best interest of the child and to provide a comprehensive child justice system with special attention to prevention and treatment of CICL”. The Act emphasises taking the best interest of the child as a primary consideration during arrest and detention, separation from parents and bail, court proceedings, and publication of the report in the media, among others. The judiciary and law enforcement agencies are familiarised and trained in the implementation of the child justice system.

66. In line with Article 21 (2) of the Constitution, the Royal Courts of Justice has established a Family and Child Bench and introduced several child-friendly initiatives in all courts including child-friendly rooms; in-camera hearing or in-situ hearings for child-related cases; use of child-friendly court setting to hear cases; and protection of child’s identity.

67. The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) has also developed and supplied the Training Manual on Child Justice 2022, with the intent to benefit agencies that may conduct training on child justice.

68. For CIDC, the CCPA mandates the appointment of Child Welfare Officers as crucial for the success of protecting and promoting child rights in the country. As an interim measure, the Gender and Child Focal Point (GCFP) and Protection Officers are appointed in each dzongkhag as focal for the Competent Authority and seek a first point of contact and referral to the appropriate service providers. The children are also supported through a One Stop Crisis Centre at the Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital (JDWNRH) in Thimphu which was established as per Section 238 of the Act.

69. While formulating and reviewing policies and programmes, the best interests of the child and the rights of the child are given due consideration. Agencies working for or with children are required to assess and establish the best interests of the child through child-friendly and child-centered processes where the child is empowered through the right to participation.

Reply to paragraph 14 (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

70. Standard and Guidelines such as the SOP on Child Protection and GBV Case Management, the SOP for dealing with CICL and Internal Framework to Child Safeguarding and Protection, and EISR handbook have been developed and rolled out. These SoPs supplement the CCPA and the regulations that specify in detail the procedures in determining the best interest of the child and focus on promoting the rights of the child, protecting them from discrimination, respecting their opinion and acting in the best interest of the child.

71. Service providers have also been trained in providing specialised services in the best interest of the child. The Child-Friendly Prosecution Guidelines and Diversion Guidelines was developed in 2017 by the OAG in consultation with the relevant stakeholders. All attorneys of the OAG have been trained on both the guidelines in 2017 and 2018.

72. A SoP for dealing with CICL has also been developed by the justice sector agencies, which has been reviewed to incorporate restorative justice, alternative sentencing and noncustodial measures in consultation with justice sector institutions.

Reply to paragraph 15(a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

73. The OAG developed Child-friendly Prosecution Guidelines and Diversion Guidelines, Sentencing Guidelines, SoP for dealing with CICL, and administration of child justice. These

standards, procedures and manuals are guided by the best interest of a child, fair treatment without discrimination, upholding rights and promoting well-being among others. Prosecutors, judges and other law enforcement officers are trained on the standards and guidelines. The RCJ ensures that children's views and opinions are considered in the processes relating to child custody. Further, during the development and implementation of policies, SoPs, standards, and guidelines, children's views and opinions are given due consideration. School law clubs have been established across the country to create awareness on the rights of children and legal issues related to children.

74. Bhutan Children's Parliament has been initiated. The Children's Parliament is an initiative to imbibe democratic ethos in children and give them first-hand experience in formulating public policy and representing issues not limited to youth.

Reply to paragraph 15 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

75. Relevant actors including children are engaged in the consultative process for formulation of policies and plans concerning children. Engagement of children in policy formulation was covered in responses to paragraph 2 (a).

76. At the community level, youth are encouraged and supported to participate in the community through voluntary groups and networks. For instance, Young Volunteers in Action (Y-VIA) has over 5,000 members in all 20 districts focusing on civic engagement, leadership, child rights and protection. In universities and colleges, youth are engaged through the Y-PEER network which is a voluntary group focused on peer education, advocacy, programme management, and fundraising, among many others.

77. To enhance children's participation in the school and family, NCWC in collaboration with relevant stakeholders is implementing the *Gakey Lamtoen* and *Dekyid Thuendrel (PwV)* projects. These projects promote positive parenting and supportive communication within families and in creating child-friendly and enabling environments within schools, homes and communities. Educational and instructional materials such as parenting manuals, instructors guide, and advocacy materials and training packages have been developed and widely disseminated in schools and communities.

Reply to paragraph 15 (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

78. The RGoB takes a two-pronged approach to enhance the capacity of judiciary and law enforcement through integration of women and child friendly procedures in the pre-service training curriculum, and targeted capacity building on specific issues. Police personnel working in Women and Children Protection Unit/Desk (WCPU/D) are periodically trained in protecting the rights of the children and on relevant SoPs and guidelines. Similarly, training for the judiciary is also provided periodically as reported in response to para 9(b). Training of social workers including voluntary groups such as Community Bases Support System (CBSS) are also conducted periodically. To minimise lengthy formal legal proceedings, law enforcement officers have been trained on the diversion method to handle cases of CICL.

Reply to paragraph 16 (a) and (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

79. As in any other country, there are clear procedures and criteria for obtaining citizenship in Bhutan, in accordance with the laws of the country. Besides natural born citizenship, there are two avenues for obtaining citizenship. They are through a) registration and b) naturalisation.

80. Efforts are ongoing to further simplify the process of birth registration. In 2021, the registration procedure was revised, allowing for birth registration to take place at the place of residence. In addition, the government initiated the Integrated Citizen Services (ICS) system to simplify and expedite the birth registration process. Civil registration and census officials are currently being trained to implement the second version of the birth and death registration procedures through ICS.

Reply to paragraph 17 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

81. The RGoB is continuously working towards providing adequate ICT infrastructure, learning materials and internet connectivity to all schools. It has set a target to achieve a computer-student ratio of 1:10 for secondary schools and 1:30 for primary schools in the 12th FYP. In addition, the RGoB is committed to providing high speed internet connectivity in all schools, creation of smart classrooms, ICT integrated teaching pedagogy, and School of the Air, among many other initiatives. Students in Bhutan from pre-primary (PP) to higher secondary attend ICT lessons. All public and private schools have computer labs and internet access. Between 2020 and 2022, 120 new ICT labs were established and 11,000 computers supplied, bringing the student computer ratio to 1:15. To enable continued participation by vulnerable students in education during the pandemic, initiatives such as those reported in response to para 2(b) were implemented.

Reply to paragraph 17 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

82. During the 12th FYP, in addition to the provision of ICT infrastructure on an equitable basis to schools and educational institutes across the country (as provided in response to para 17(a)), ICT education focused on building and applying digital skills with special projects on Non-Formal Education (NFE) and SEN. With expanding access, the challenges posed by the internet such as access to harmful materials were well recognized and digital literacy training at both national and local level for officials, community members and students were carried out by the RGoB and CSOs.

83. Digital citizenship education to empower students to participate responsibly, safely and ethically in the digital world, and enhancing parents' capability to guide their children to use technology safely and productively is an integral part of the ICT education masterplan (2019-2023). This also includes providing digital literacy to NFE learners and people at the community learning centres. Digital citizenship education is provided to children by MoESD and CSOs across Bhutan. Further, NCWC in collaboration with CSOs conducted numerous training sessions for parents on how to guide their children in using the internet safely. During the EVAC campaign, child online protection was one of the thematic areas to protect children from online abuse and harmful information and materials.

84. The draft National Education Policy (2022), once approved, will further strengthen access through the provision of infrastructure, management and other resources.

Reply to paragraph 17 (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

85. Chapter 17 of the Information, Communication and Media Act of Bhutan 2018 ensures the protection of online and offline privacy, including those of children. The provisions emphasise respecting and protecting privacy of personal information, instituting privacy policies in all organisations collecting personal information, and limiting the collection of personal information. Further, Section 28 of the CCPA mandates the media to maintain professional standards including privacy in reporting and covering cases of CIDC and CICL. Advocacy on cybersecurity and privacy is disseminated through the broadcast and other media to raise awareness on online safety and prevalent scams in the country. To help promote positive use of the internet, Bhutan also joined the global community to mark 'Safer Internet Day' in 2018.

86. In addition, the development of the National Child Online Protection (COP) Guidelines is underway and further work on guidelines for children, parents, educators, industry and policymakers is also in progress.

87. The Government Technology Agency (GovTech) also developed and widely disseminated numerous awareness materials covering topics related to password security, email security, social media phishing and scams through national television, print media and social media platforms. Advocacy posters were distributed to all Primary, Middle and Higher Secondary Schools in the country. Online safety tips for high school students were published and distributed free to all high schools. In addition, various government agencies and CSOs

conduct periodic training for school children. GovTech also maintains a separate website and social media page for facilitating cyber incident reporting.

Reply to paragraph 18 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

88. The draft NCP provides a policy framework to prohibit all forms of abuse and VAC. It includes elimination of corporal punishment across all settings and promotes positive discipline. While discussion to amend Section 109 of the PCB and other Acts continues, once endorsed the policy along with the interventions on positive parenting and discipline is expected to deter corporal punishment across all settings. Positive parenting projects have been implemented to create child friendly environments within schools and communities as reported in response to para 15(b). MoESD has also adopted uniform school discipline guidelines to ensure child rights perspectives are incorporated.

Reply to paragraph 18 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

89. Please see responses to para 18(a). NCWC is currently rolling out parenting without violence toolkits in 3 pilot dzongkhags. The objective is to train community mentors and school trainers on parenting without violence and also to sensitise children on child rights, child protection and gender-based issues. In 2019, MoESD conducted a nationwide professional development training on Basic Helping Skills which emphasises positive disciplining to all the teachers. MoESD is implementing the revised ‘School Discipline Policy Guidelines 2023’ and adopting a comprehensive range of strategies as well as partnerships of school, family, and community for effective implementation. This guideline emphasises the need to create an inclusive environment and the importance of mutual respect and self-worth by educating them with important life skills. The revised guideline will be implemented in all schools including private schools.

90. In monastic institutions, corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure has seen a significant decline after the decree issued by His Holiness the *Je Khenpo* (Chief Abbot) in 2009, denouncing corporal punishment. The childcare and protection office established by the *Dratshang Lhentshog* in 2009 remains an advocate for alternative means of discipline in monasteries and nunneries. In 2019, His Holiness the *Je Khenpo* issued a decree emphasising on the well-being and protection of children from violence and other forms of exploitation.

Reply to paragraph 18 (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

91. Although no cases of corporal punishment have reached the High Court, Monggar district court sentenced a school principal to prison for three months for inflicting corporal punishment on a student in 2014. The principal was also made to pay compensation to the student. The court ruled that by using corporal punishment, the principal had gone against the nation’s education policy.

Reply to paragraph 18 (d) of the list of issues prior to reporting

92. An early childhood parenting model with a thematic approach to address the health, learning and protection needs of young children is currently being implemented. It recognizes the role of parents in improving the well-being and developmental outcomes of children. Through the implementation of this model, parents engage in dialogues that enable them to share their experiences and support each other. In addition, April is observed annually as “parenting month” during which MoESD organises a number of programs to advocate for positive parenting across schools in Bhutan for both students and parents.

93. The NCWC is implementing the *Gakey Lamtoen* and *Dekyid Thuendrel* projects respectively, aimed at promoting positive parenting and supportive communication within families and creating child-friendly and enabling environments within schools and communities. Related materials such as parenting manuals and training packages have been developed and disseminated. CSO partners also carry out various awareness-raising

programs for local government functionaries and community members to promote positive and non-violent parenting and to ensure the needs and rights of children and youth.

Reply to paragraph 19 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

94. Pursuant to Article 9 (18) of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan and Article 19 of the CRC (1989), the State and all its entities are required to take appropriate measures to ensure that children are protected against all forms of discrimination and exploitation including trafficking, prostitution, abuse, violence, degrading treatment and economic exploitation. In line with this requirement, measures as provided in response under para 14(c) have been undertaken.

95. The multi-sectoral Social and Behavioural Change to EVAC campaign launched in 2022 by the NCWC in partnership with 22 agencies was geared towards preventing and combating all forms of VAC the details of which are provided under paragraph 9(a).

96. Rules and Regulations on Content 2019 developed by Bhutan InfoComm & Media Authority requires good practice and standards of content disseminated by the Bhutanese ICT and Media service providers. The rules categorically prohibit child sexual exploitation and abuse.

97. In schools, the ICT Curriculum Framework 2021, developed by MoESD is aimed at developing the ability of students to use ICT appropriately and responsibly. The framework also has a Safety and Ethics strand to encourage students to become responsible digital citizens and to use ICT in a responsible, ethical, and safe manner.

Reply to paragraph 19 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

98. In 2020, CBSS volunteers carried out awareness programs to about 3,000 community leaders and the general public on reporting procedures and available services for survivors in 17 districts and two municipalities. Basic procedures for responding to violence were integrated in the curriculum of the *De-suung*¹¹ Training Program and 3,000 *De-suups* (2,350 males and 650 females) were trained. A total of 3,800 frontline workers, including health workers, law enforcement personnel, local government leaders, and members of CSOs such as the Taxi Association were also trained on responding to VAC and GBV.

99. To provide timely and uninterrupted services to the survivors, online case management, counselling and emergency services were provided during the pandemic by the NCWC and other government and CSO partners. A guideline for responding to GBV in emergencies was developed in November 2020, taking into consideration the lessons learned from the first national lockdown in August 2020. A total of 507 adult survivors, of which 475 were women and those at risk of experiencing violence, have benefitted from the services between 20 March 2020 and 30 April 2021. A crisis helpline with a first response team and emergency shelters in 20 districts were also set up on the command of Her Majesty The Queen during the second and third national lockdowns. Online counselling and case management services were also provided by the NCWC, MoESD and CSOs.

100. In addition to measures listed under para 14(c) and 19(a), NCWC has also been providing training on EISR, Child Protection and GBV case management for all frontline workers and case managers. The women and child helpline 1098 which was established in 2018 is an integral part of preventing and responding to VAC. The survivors can also use the NCWC app, a mobile application to report cases and avail services. Similarly, The PEMA, NL, RENEW, Pride Bhutan also provide helpline services for mental health services, child protection issues, children belonging to Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans and gender diverse, Intersex, Queer and Questioning (LGBT+) community and GBV.

101. To ensure effective implementation of the Act, the NCWC conducted an assessment of the implementation progress of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act, 2013(DVPA)and

¹¹ De-suung” is a civilian volunteer organization which can be translated to “Guardians of Peace.” It is a three-week training programme.

its rules and regulations in 2020. The assessment focused on understanding the implementation status and the relevance of certain provisions of the Act. The assessment recommended reviews including Section 22 to make it relevant to recent developments. The review process will be initiated together with implementation of the other recommendations.

Reply to paragraph 19 (d) of the list of issues prior to reporting

102. A SoP for Child Protection and GBV was developed in line with the international standard and training has been conducted for case managers. Numerous trainings were also conducted on EISR for Labour and Immigration officials, Health Workers, Teachers, Parents, Children and young persons. The Judiciary has undertaken a nationwide Child Justice System training for all judicial staff under the RCJ. As mandated by the CCPA, every law enforcement agency that deals with a child in contact with law must ensure child friendly procedures and uphold the best interests of the child as one of the core principles. The OAG has also developed a comprehensive training manual on the administration of child justice with particular emphasis on a child in conflict with the law and a child in difficult circumstances.

103. In addition, the NCWC annually organises the GCFP meeting where the GCFPs are oriented on the initiatives to promote gender equality, child well-being and protection, and to discuss the challenges and way forward. The annual meeting also sensitises and builds capacities of the GCFPs on legal provisions and on dealing with cases pertaining to women and children in the country.

Reply to paragraph 19 (e) of the list of issues prior to reporting

104. The PCB, DVPA, CCPA mandates reporting of child abuse cases to relevant authorities. Case managers have been trained to ensure cases are dealt with in a holistic, child-centred and child-friendly approach through the implementation of child protection case management and GBV SOP and Guidelines, for details refer to response provided in para. 14(c).

Reply to paragraph 19 (f) of the list of issues prior to reporting

105. In January 2020, NCWC developed the SOP for Child Protection and GBV Case Management and completed several rounds of training. Child-Friendly Prosecution Guidelines and Child-Friendly Diversion Guidelines were developed to ensure that CICAL are dealt with in a child-friendly manner and also to streamline the prosecution process in keeping with child justice rights. The NCWC in collaboration with the justice sector revised the SoP for CICAL to ensure systematic procedures to address the needs of CICAL. Further, the RCJ has established child-friendly court rooms across the country. The NCWC also established WCCs in all 20 dzongkhags and the 4 Thromdes in 2019 to enhance multisectoral collaboration and accountability.

Reply to paragraph 19 (g) of the list of issues prior to reporting

106. For children with inappropriate sexual behaviour, advocacy and preventive work have been strengthened through the adolescent health programme. The MoH prioritises vulnerable adolescents and youth to improve their physical and mental health by appropriately addressing all risk factors and health concerns. Treatment programs such as comprehensive health check-ups, counselling, self-care and sexual and reproductive health services, motivational interventions to prevent substance abuse and other high-risk behaviours, mental health consultations, rehabilitation efforts and reintegration into community and linkages with schools, periodic review and monitoring are also carried out to ensure their well-being.

Reply to paragraph 19 (h) of the list of issues prior to reporting

107. There are no updates on this matter. The harmonisation and consolidation of laws will be initiated after the formation of a review committee.

Reply to paragraph 19 (i) of the list of issues prior to reporting

108. On 11 October, 2018, a Woman and Child Helpline (1098) was established to provide timely, effective and accessible services to women and children in need of care and protection. The helpline is manned 24/7 by five officials who are counsellors, case managers and social workers. NCWC also maintains a mobile app which is linked with the helpline as additional means to seek support or lodge complaints. NCWC coordinates with other service providers to deliver multi sectoral response and support. Similarly, other agencies such as the PEMA, Nazhoen Lamtoen (NL), RENEW, RENEW and Pride Bhutan also provide support through their helplines for mental health services, child protection issues, children belonging to LGBTIQ community and GBV.

Reply to paragraph 20 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

109. The Royal Civil Service Commission extended the duration of maternity leave for civil servants from three months to six months and paternity leave from five days to ten days¹⁶ in 2016. The same has also been adopted by most state-owned corporations and the large private sector companies. On 10 November, 2022, the RGoB announced a grant of Nu. 10,000 to members of the Civil Service Welfare Scheme on the birth of a child.

110. The NCWC carried out a study on the valuation of women's unpaid care work to document the gender dimensions of unpaid care work, highlight the quantitative significance and provide recommendations to reduce and redistribute the burden of women's unpaid care work. The recommendations from the study were included in the NGEP as well as the National Plan of Action on Gender Equality. Additionally, possibilities of integration in the GNH and labour force survey are being explored to ensure regular and sustainable collection of data on unpaid care work.

111. The 12th FYP identified gender equality as a cross-cutting theme and mandated all ministries and autonomous agencies to establish crèche centres for their employees to ensure safety and well-being of children. The 12th FYP included establishing crèche centres in government agencies as a KPI under the Agency Key Result Area "Gender friendly working conditions and environment strengthened".

112. The Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment (MoICE) and private training institutes provide non-credited short-term training programs for critical services including ECCD facilitators. Further, the National Multi-Sectoral ECCD Strategic Action Plan for Bhutan: A Roadmap to 2030 is being implemented with concerted efforts from several key sectors to ensure the best start in life for all children in Bhutan.

113. Parenting education was made mandatory in all ECCD programs to ensure a safe and stimulating home environment and to educate the parents on the caregiver's role in relation to supporting child outcomes. Parenting education also aims to strengthen or modify parent's attitudes, beliefs and practices related to caring for the child, and develop motivation to work as a team to address community issues that affect early childhood well-being in the community. MoESD has also piloted the 'caring for caregivers' program to support parents and caregivers.

Reply to paragraph 20 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

114. The SIE 2017 outlines gender equality as one of the standards and recommends all schools to develop a culture where boys and girls are treated with equality, and feel valued and supported. It emphasises the need to review practices and plans of schools to overcome gender inequality, while simultaneously sensitising the community on gender equality.

115. The school curriculum for all grades and subjects has been reviewed and revised based on recommendations from agencies and independent reviewers to make it more inclusive and gender sensitive. Illustrations that reinforce gender stereotypes were removed and a specific module on gender has been integrated into the social studies curriculum for grade five with the objective of transforming gender-stereotypical mindsets from a young age.

116. In addition, MoESD is implementing Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) and Scouting Education where gender is a key component. NCWC and MoESD piloted the *Gakey Lamtoen* project in 2018 and 2019. The project, through its engagement with caregivers and adolescents, aims to address the harmful social and cultural norms and discriminatory stereotypes. The evaluation of the project found it effective in changing gender attitudes and stereotypes. MoESD will integrate the gender component of the project and its teaching approaches in scouting education and CSE.

117. To address stereotypes and prejudices around gender division of roles and encourage men and boys to share unpaid care and domestic responsibilities, the NCWC launched a media campaign #BetterTogether in 2020. The campaign featured men from all walks of life sharing their experiences of sharing household work and the importance of shared responsibilities at home.

Reply to paragraph 21 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

118. As per the Alternative Care Guideline 2018, and Child Adoption Act (CAA) 2012, NCWC is mandated to implement and provide clarity with regard to alternative care and to ensure children grow up in a stable living environment with love, care and protection. To assess the suitability of alternative care, NCWC conducts home visits to assess income status, home environment, education, criminal records and health of the applicants. Post monitoring visits are conducted yearly to assess living conditions, education, health, food and sleeping patterns, and adaptation with the rest of the family members. NCWC, in collaboration with Government agencies and CSO partners facilitate and support families of children in disadvantaged situations through skills building, entrepreneurship programs, micro finance, employment and enrollment into various welfare schemes, so that children are reintegrated into the family environment.

Reply to paragraph 21 (b) (i) of the list of issues prior to reporting

119. Monastic schools and nunneries adhere to norms and standards regarding care and development of children as per the CCPA 2011, and its related policies and standards. The *Dratshang Lhentshog* and BNF have taken several initiatives over the years to ensure the overall well-being of children and young people in its care. Since 2007, sensitization and awareness programs on child rights and protection have been conducted for key monastic figures and efforts continue to be made to improve the overall living conditions in monastic institutions as well as in institutionalising alternative forms of discipline. In 2009, an Expert Member Committee was established as an advisory body to the senior management on policy and programming advice, and guidance. An assessment of the Child Protection Program Strategy and Action Plan (2017-2022) of *Dratshang* (Central Monastic Body) was conducted and a new strategy taking a child rights-based approach has been developed. The new strategy lays down steps and interventions to prevent, identify and respond to child protection concerns that can be taken to build a protective environment for children in the monastic institutions and nunneries.

Reply to paragraph 21 (b) (ii) of the list of issues prior to reporting

120. See the response in para 2(b) and 9(a). The NCWC, as the competent authority of the CCPA and CAA ensures that children are protected from all forms of discrimination and exploitation including in alternative care and adoption. Programs and activities in relation to VAC are implemented in collaboration with CSOs, monasteries and nunneries. Monastic

institutions were key implementing partners in the roll out of multi-sectoral social and behavioural change to EVAC.

Reply to paragraph 21 (b) (iii) of the list of issues prior to reporting

121. Refer to response provided in para 14(c). In 2021, monastic schools and nunneries adopted the Internal Child Safeguarding and Protection Framework. The framework provides a response and reporting mechanism and detailed procedures for reporting incidents of abuse that may come to the attention of the concerned agency by direct disclosure, observation, suspicion or allegation, and the management of reported incidents. Regional representatives under the *Dratshang Lhentshog* monitor the monastic schools and nunneries from time to time.

Reply to paragraph 21 (b) (iv) of the list of issues prior to reporting

122. There are several avenues available to children to make complaints concerning violations of their rights. Children have access to the helplines as reported in response to para 19(i). Children have the option of making walk-in complaints to WCPU/D of the RBP. Children can also report violations to CBSS volunteers including through community service centres and GCFPs. The volunteers and focal points are trained in handling issues related to violence against women and children, and other issues affecting them. The monastic schools and nunneries can also lodge complaints to regional representatives of the *Dratshang Lhengtshog*.

Reply to paragraph 21 (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

123. In line with the CCPA and CAA and its Rules and Regulations, the NCWC places children who need care and protection under alternative care (Foster/Kinship) as per the Alternative Care Guidelines 2018. The guideline applies to all matters relating to alternative care of CIDC. These children are evaluated and monitored yearly to ensure their continued well-being. Some of the aspects covered during the yearly monitoring are assessment pertaining to the child's health, education, family interaction, food and sleep patterns, the home environment and other related information. The NCWC has processed a total of 30 alternative care cases from 2017 till 2022.

Reply to paragraph 21 (d) of the list of issues prior to reporting

124. Please see response to para 21(c). The guidelines specify the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders. As the competent authority for the CCPA 2011 and the CAA of Bhutan 2012, NCWC ensures that all adoptions are registered and approved by the RCJ. Children placed under adoption are evaluated and monitored annually for inter-country adoption and every two years for domestic adoption.

Reply to paragraph 21 (e) of the list of issues prior to reporting

125. None, till date, Bhutan did not receive any proposals for surrogacy arrangements from within and outside the country. Depending on the need, the RGoB may consider such a framework in the future.

Reply to paragraph 22 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

126. Bhutan signed the Convention in 2010. A high-level task force was formed in 2016 to study and undertake pre-ratification processes of the convention. The Convention has now been submitted to the Parliament for ratification. Response to revision of CCPA is provided under Para 4(a).

127. Bhutan launched the NPPD in 2019 to ensure that the vulnerable and marginalised group enjoy the same rights and opportunities as the rest of the population. The policy ensures access to education, health, justice, and protection services for children with disabilities and is closely aligned with the CRPD.

Reply to paragraph 22 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

128. Following the development of the action plan for the implementation of the NPPD 2019, implementing agencies were tasked with mainstreaming the action plan into their respective plans and programs. Some of the activities implemented include launch of 27 new city buses fitted with disability friendly features such as ramps and audio notification in 2021 and a 20% discount for PwD availing the smart card. Development of an advocacy toolkit on access to justice for PwD described in response to paragraph 13(b). A situational analysis and needs assessment on three policy intervention areas was completed which yielded a set of recommendations on building disability-inclusive employment, social protection and TVET system. Based on these assessment reports, a sensitisation seminar was conducted for a total of 25 participants representing relevant agencies from RGoB, CSOs and the private sector in July 2022. Equipment such as Braille Embossers and Braille paper was procured for the *Muenselling* Institute. *Wangsel* Institute for the Deaf also received equipment, teaching and learning materials for four vocational trades.

129. The erstwhile Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC) was previously designated as the implementing and monitoring entity. However, with the recent public sector transformation and reorganisation of agencies that is underway, the RGoB is in the process of designation of an appropriate national entity.

Reply to paragraph 22 (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

130. RGoB continues to work towards equal access, equity and quality education for children with disabilities. A 10-year roadmap for Inclusive and Special Education 2018–2028 has been developed which includes an action plan on creating a cross-sectoral ‘inclusive and special education coordination committee’ by the MoESD.

131. Inclusive schools in the country have increased to 39 from 26 in 2022 which has positively impacted enrolment of children with disabilities.¹² The publication of the first edition of Bhutanese Sign Language (BSL) Grammar and report enhanced quality inclusive education for children with hearing impairment.

132. The Caring for Caregivers programme piloted in three districts trained approximately 260 caregivers on parenting education. 2,420 home-based kits were provided to children from vulnerable backgrounds to support them with their learning at home. Additionally, inclusive and special education resource centres have also been developed in 11 schools and over 200 teachers, principals, and district education officers have been trained on inclusive education, leadership and educational assessment tools. Another 150 teachers have been trained in inclusive education standards, educational assessment and intervention strategies to enhance basic awareness, capacity and confidence of teachers placed in inclusive schools.

Reply to paragraph 22 (d) of the list of issues prior to reporting

133. In 2019, Bhutan instituted a mechanism for early identification and diagnosis of disabilities in children. Bhutan Child Development Screening Tool (BCDST) was developed to detect developmental delays and disabilities in children as early as possible. The BCDST is a comprehensive standardised tool that assesses various domains of a child’s development, including cognitive, language, social, and emotional development. The BCDST was incorporated in the Mother and Child Health (MCH) Handbook to help identify major red flags in the development milestones of children aged 0-5 years, allowing for early and prompt

¹² In 2021, six more inclusive schools were established in the western and southern districts to provide access to inclusive special education for 150 (68 F & 82 M) additional students with disabilities.

intervention. The tool is designed to be administered by trained health workers, including nurses, health assistants, and community health workers during routine healthcare visits. Parents or caregivers are also involved in the screening process. Health workers from 20 districts have been trained on BCDST. In schools, including private and monastic institutions, Rapid Functional Assessment (RFA) and Brigance are used to assess learning difficulties in children.

Reply to paragraph 22 (e) of the list of issues prior to reporting

134. Bhutan is continuously working towards ensuring that PwD enjoy full rights and have access to the highest attainable standard of health as any other person as articulated in Section 21 and 22 of Article 9 of the Constitution of Bhutan. Healthcare in Bhutan is free and all health infrastructure is designed to be accessible to PwD, women, children and the elderly in keeping with the National Health Policy (NHP) 2011.

135. The RGoB adopted the NPPD 2019 which further directs the health sector to improve access to all health infrastructure and services by providing reasonable adjustment in existing infrastructure and adopting universal access designs in new infrastructure. The health sector ensures easy and affordable access to assistive technologies such as wheelchairs, orthoses, prostheses and hearing aids, among many others. In line with the policy, MoH is working toward introducing measures to assist PwD in accessing health facilities and services such as introduction of a dedicated counter, providing interpreters for hearing impaired in referral hospitals and giving priority in health centres. The RGoB also adopted a Guideline for Differently Abled Friendly Constructions to make buildings and public places accessible to all.

Reply to paragraph 22 (f) of the list of issues prior to reporting

136. The NPPD 2019 accords high importance to conducting awareness and sensitisation to remove attitudinal barriers. CSOs working with and for children regularly carry out advocacy programmes on the promotion of the rights of people with disabilities, rights of children with disabilities, prevention of disability, the importance of early intervention, inclusion, and inclusive education. The RGoB annually observes World Cerebral Palsy Day on 6th October, World Down Syndrome Day on 21st March, World Autism Awareness Day on 2nd April and International Day for Persons with Disability on 3rd December. CSOs engaged with children with disabilities were among the implementing partners during the rollout of the multi-sectoral SBC to EVAC campaign. The roadmap which emphasises awareness and the initiatives of MoESD on awareness is reported in response to para 22(c).

Reply to paragraph 23 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

137. MoH has adopted and implemented numerous standards, guidelines and manuals such as National Adolescent Health Strategic Plans, National Standards and Implementation Guide for Youth Friendly Health Services, National Family Planning Standards, among many others. Further, a policy note on Accelerating MCH Programme was approved by the Cabinet in 2019. A Mother and Child Hospital is being built in the eastern district of Mongar as a critical step towards achieving the RGoB's aspiration of ensuring equitable access to mother and child friendly health services. MoH prioritises investments in building adequate health human resources. Renewed initiatives and collaboration with relevant institutions in the country and overseas are being pursued to address the shortage. Healthcare workers are hired from a pool of retirees on short-term contracts and from foreign recruitment programs. Moreover, additional scholarships are provided to train nurses and doctors both within and outside to ensure adequate health human resources. Perinatal mental health care service was piloted in the JDWNRH and subsequently, full-fledged maternal mental health screening and services is introduced in Gyaltshen Jetsun Pema Mother and Child Hospital, JDWNRH. Additionally, the integration of maternal mental health screening in the new Mother and Child Health Handbook ensures that every mother will be assessed for common mental health issues during their antenatal care (ANC) and postnatal care (PNC) visits.

138. The RGoB continues to invest in cold chain equipment. The National Immunization Policy and Strategic Guidelines 2011 stresses strengthening of the cold chain system, vaccine management, supervisory skills and advocacy, and social mobilisation. In 2022, the RGoB invested approximately Nu. 120 million to procure and install 2,134 cold chain equipment comprising walk-in-coolers, walk-in-freezers, ice lined refrigerators, ultralow temperature freezer, solar refrigerators, cold boxes and vaccine carriers among others, across the country. Investments were also made in procuring generators, temperature monitoring devices and tools kits in all healthcare facilities. Such investments improve the immunisation efforts in Bhutan not only by enhancing the storage capacity for life-saving vaccines, but also by digitising the services and building capacity of technicians in maintenance, repair and up-keep of cold chain equipment.

Reply to paragraph 23 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

139. To improve access to quality healthcare services, Bhutan has been continuously investing towards developing and consolidating a strong health infrastructure with adequate manpower. In 2021, Bhutan had 52 hospitals including one national referral and 2 regional referral hospitals, 185 Primary Health Centres (PHC), 54 Sub-posts and 554 Out-Reach Clinics (ORCs). Traditional medicine is an integral component of the overall health system in Bhutan and in 2021 there was one hospital in Thimphu and 74 traditional medicine units across the country. The Kidu Medical Unit, established under Royal Command, carries out mobile medical camps to expand access to quality health care services in remote areas. The medical camp provides a comprehensive package of health services including endoscopy and ultrasound. The team includes a medical specialist, gynaecologist, paediatrician, dentist, ENT, and surgeon. MoH periodically conducts health camps to reach the difficult-to-reach and unreached population to improve access to quality and specialised healthcare services.

140. Towards enhancing universal and quality health coverage, the RGoB is developing ePIS (electronic patient information system). The deployment of ePIS is expected to ensure higher patient safety, improve service delivery, equipment and medicine management, and improve access to medical supply in rural areas. All healthcare workers will be trained in use of the system which is likely to be implemented in 2024.

Reply to paragraph 23 (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

141. Bhutan adopted the National Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan (2021–2025) to address undernutrition, particularly stunting and micronutrient deficiencies among vulnerable populations. The innovative School Meal Planner PLUS tool was rolled out in partnership with MoESD, MoH, Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources (MoENR), in nine districts covering 29% of all feeding schools in the country. By December 2022, 17,460 children aged 6–23 months across 20 districts received Multiple Micronutrient Powder (MNP) supplementation to prevent stunting and anaemia, and to improve nutrition of children. This has been scaled up in all health facilities. Of the targeted 18,000 children, 17,460 aged 6–23 months were reached. Prior to the distribution of MNP packages, health workers counselled parents/caregivers on the importance of quality complementary feeding, MNP supplementation, preparation and feeding children in a hygienic manner. The School Feeding and Nutrition Management Handbook was endorsed and used as a guide by stakeholders involved in the feeding programme. Concerted efforts are made to enhance knowledge, skills and practices on healthy diets and physical activity among school aged-children including monks and nuns, youth, women of reproductive age, pregnant and lactating mothers, and the general population.

142. In line with the strategy, free meals are provided through the School Feeding Programme which strives to make school meals more nutritious, based on specific nutritional requirements of the children. Three meals for students in boarding schools, two meals for students walking long distances to school, and one meal for students in rural schools are provided. MoESD is also in the process of developing a social behaviour change strategy to improve dietary habits among children and adolescents in Bhutan.

Reply to paragraph 23 (d) of the list of issues prior to reporting

143. Bhutan has long recognized the need to promote exclusive breastfeeding and extended maternity leave to six months for civil servants in March 2016. Similar initiatives were also adopted by corporate and private sector. The MCH received prime importance in the 12th Plan. Accelerating MCH policy and the 1000 golden days plus programme was approved by the RGoB in September 2020. The policy promotes increasing the uptake of MCH services such as the required number of eight Antenatal Care (ANC) visits, institutional delivery, four Postnatal Care (PNC) visits, immunisation, and exclusive breastfeeding for six months.

144. Implementation of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes is underway. The provision is adequately covered in the draft Food and Nutrition Security Policy of Bhutan 2022 which is awaiting approval. The MoH has also proposed for inclusion of such practices in the upcoming National Food and Drug Bill of Bhutan.

Reply to paragraph 23 (e) of the list of issues prior to reporting

145. The National Adolescent Health Strategic Plan provides a comprehensive framework for the provision of multi-disciplinary and well-coordinated adolescent health services in the country. Adolescent health care packages, including sexual and reproductive health, are available to all boys and girls through the Adolescent Friendly Health Services (AFHS) Clinics and designated focal persons across different hospitals. A separate Unit at the MoH was created to monitor and liaise with stakeholders to implement adolescent health programs across the nation. A total of 125 AFHS focal persons provide services in all district hospitals. The AFHS focal persons and clinics facilitate direct access to SRH services, including follow-up and referral, within the health facilities for specialised services. An AFHS training manual was developed to institutionalise capacity building of health workers. The manual offers standardised training to both in-service and pre-service healthcare providers. In addition, the revised national family planning manual for health workers includes specific components on family planning for adolescents. The manual is expected to enhance the knowledge, abilities, and skills for providing quality, rights-based, client-focused family planning services across the country.

146. The institutionalisation of CSE has empowered young people, particularly adolescents, with knowledge, skills and capabilities in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). The National Strategic Framework on CSE was adopted in 2021 to accelerate the concerted efforts of key stakeholders in providing sexual and reproductive health services and education. To de-stigmatize menstruation and address challenges related to menstruation faced by girls and women, the Red Dot Bhutan Campaign was launched in 2022 and carried out across schools and nunneries.

Reply to paragraph 23 (f) of the list of issues prior to reporting

147. Advocacy and information on teenage pregnancy is provided through school health education programs and outreach programs for out-of-school youth. The National Strategic Framework on CSE mandates the provision of age-appropriate CSE to all young people through various means and in ensuring equitable and easy access to youth-friendly integrated SRHR information and services including teenage pregnancy. CSE competence training and adapted CSE learning materials were also made available for both general and visually impaired in-service teachers and students in 23 priority schools across 16 districts. The Bhutan New-born Action Plan (2016-2023), a road map towards accelerating the reduction of new-born death, is being updated. Specific actions to prevent teenage pregnancy through enhanced counselling services for adolescent girls, early identification, and appropriate medical services are being strengthened. Awareness initiatives of the RGoB are supplemented by advocacy conducted by CSOs through dissemination of awareness materials.

Reply to paragraph 23 (g) of the list of issues prior to reporting

148. Section 146 of the PCB allows for medical termination of pregnancies in cases where there is risk to the mother's life, or when the pregnancy is a result of incest and rape, or where the mother is in unsound mental condition. The standard guidelines for management of complications of abortion for health workers highlight the need to provide post-abortion services with respect and in an unbiased manner to increase their access to all services, including post-abortion family planning and contraception counselling.

Reply to paragraph 23 (h) of the list of issues prior to reporting

149. The National Health Policy ensures provision of mental health services up to the PHC in an integrated approach. Suicide Prevention in Bhutan – A Five Year Action Plan (2018–2023), is currently under implementation. The Plan adopts a multi sectoral approach and outlines roles of all individuals and agencies in supporting the prevention of suicide, while identifying key institutional services and capacity gaps in providing timely, appropriate and quality mental health and psycho-social services. It will be reviewed and a comprehensive mental health and suicide prevention strategy will be developed. The PEMA has developed Health and Wellbeing Screening Tools to facilitate early identification and prompt provision of services for mental health needs among students. These screening tools encompass assessments for common mental health concerns, physical health issues, and even suicide risk, ensuring comprehensive support for students' well-being.

150. The National Health Policy ensures provision of mental health services up to the PHC in an integrated approach. In 2018, the RGoB adopted an action plan on suicide prevention. The plan aims to prevent and combat suicide and other mental health concerns and also to contribute to better protection and support. One objective is that no child and young person should be exposed to mental health and suicide.

151. Recognizing the critical role of counsellors in providing mental health and psychosocial support to students and young people, capacities of school guidance counsellors are enhanced through regular training on family intervention, psychosocial support and psychological first aid. Between 2020–2021, 177 counsellors were trained to provide such services. MoESD implemented the student resilience development program in all schools which also covers aspects of mental health. In the same period, the MoESD and NCWC, in collaboration with relevant government agencies and CSO partners, launched two online campaigns¹³ to normalise and promote action on mental health for children and youth. Subsequently, the MoESD and NCWC helpline saw an increase in the number of cases received by the end of the campaign.¹⁴ A total of 552 children sought counselling services after the campaign.

152. The PEMA is currently working on the draft National Policy on Prevention and Response to Sexual Violence, which lays greater emphasis on prevention and response to sexual violence as well as mental health and wellbeing of survivors.

Reply to paragraph 23 (i) of the list of issues prior to reporting

153. The PEMA is mandated to carry out advocacy and public awareness programs on the ill effects of drugs and alcohol abuse and provide services to alcohol and substance users. The RBP also supplements in sensitising and assisting parents, families, youth and communities to address and prevent Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS). The RBP has also established a Narcotics Drugs and Other Vices.

154. Government agencies and CSOs remain actively engaged in sensitising the population on the ill effects of drugs and alcohol use. A number of campaigns to disseminate information through newspaper, television, social media, workplace awareness and education are

¹³ Project Gawa38 in 2020 and #OnMyMind in 2021.

¹⁴ From 204 cases received between March and August to 528 in one month of the campaign.

organised from time-to-time. The national news broadcasters also host talk-shows with recovered individuals to educate the public.

155. Rehabilitation services for alcohol and substance users are provided by the PEMA as reported in response to para 2(a). A 100-bedded National Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Center will also be established within 2023. The PEMA in collaboration with MoH rolled out substance use disorder (SUD) treatment, effective referral pathway and care services from October 2022 in 4 hospitals which will be gradually scaled up to all District hospitals. School-based Substance Use Prevention and Care Programme has been initiated, which will gradually be scaled up to all educational institutions. Bhutan Institute of Well-being, operated by a CSO, also provides a three-month rehabilitation and reintegration programme. As of 2022, more than 600 clients with SUD were treated and rehabilitated at the centre.

156. The RGoB initiated the annual health check-up which includes drug tests for all civil servants from July 2018 to promote healthy lifestyles through advocacy and early detection of diseases. The MoESD has also initiated a similar program to conduct random testing of students and teachers on the use of controlled substances and provide interventions at the earliest. The test is conducted by school health coordinators. Those who test positive will be provided counselling or sent for rehabilitation for three to six months depending on the severity.

Reply to paragraph 24 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

157. The National Environment Protection Act 2007 and the Climate Change Policy of the Kingdom of Bhutan 2020 provide strategic guidance to ensure that Bhutan remains carbon neutral and protects the well-being of the people of Bhutan by adapting to climate change in an efficient and effective manner. NCWC, as an agency advocating for the rights of children, participated in the formulation of the policy and is identified as a key implementing partner of the policy. NCWC's primary role in the policy is to mainstream gender-responsive and child-centred climate actions.

158. To develop resilience and reduce vulnerability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and minimise future climate risks and disaster risk, the National Disaster Management and Contingency Plan, 2023 also outlines the procedures and protocols for disaster risk prevention and mitigation, adequate preparedness for responding to and recovering from all types of disasters with special focus on children, adolescents, young people and women in the country.

Reply to paragraph 24 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

159. MoESD in partnership with CSOs developed several educational materials for schools, monastic institutions, NFE and local communities. Environment and climate-related risks are part of the geography curriculum in schools and are also covered in environment science subjects in grade 9 and 11. Teachers were trained to teach climate change by integrating it in their curriculum. For instance, over 60 teachers from schools across Thimphu were trained to improve awareness about climate change. One of the colleges under the Royal University of Bhutan also engages with schools to raise awareness on climate change using board games and other techniques. To make the subject of climate change easy and to enable first hand learning, more than 21 schools from different ecological zones and geographical regions participated in a project to monitor climate change. The project trained more than 1,500 students and 110 environment teachers on phenology monitoring protocol.

160. Disaster awareness is key to reducing disaster risk in school. The Teacher's Handbook for School Disaster Risk Management and Planning emphasises sensitising school staff and community members on disaster risk reduction and instituting a disaster management committee in each school. Schools have initiatives such as information boards, poster competitions, school quizzes and debates, expert talks, and setting up disaster management clubs to raise awareness among children. 21st September is designated as National Mock Drill Day and all teachers, students and staff participate in the drill. MoESD has also developed a school disaster and climate risk curriculum framework for grades PP to 12.

Reply to paragraph 24 (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

161. The RGoB has prioritised access to drinking water through its Water Flagship program which has provided drinking water access to more than 10,000 households since the start of the project in 2019. This has involved renovating existing water supply projects and building new infrastructure both in urban and rural areas. The RGoB - Desuung partnership also works towards expanding access to water. A total of 39 drinking and irrigation water projects have been executed through the RGoB-*Desuung* partnership. Of this, 31 projects have been completed benefitting 3,931 households with the engagement of 2,387 *Desuups*. Almost all households (99.9%) have access to improved water sources and about 83% of households have 24-hour access to drinking water.

Reply to paragraph 25 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

162. Bhutan's holistic approach to development has led to a reduction in poverty by enhancing access to roads, electricity, water, sanitation and education. As mandated by the country's Constitution, the RGoB provides free access to basic health services in both modern and traditional medicines and free education for all children of school-going age up to tenth standard. The RGoB's policies and planned investments have been successful in reaching disadvantaged families. With access to improved sanitation nationwide, Bhutan declared itself as an Open Defecation Free (ODF) country in November 2022. Additionally, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene facilities including inclusive toilets, and menstrual hygiene in monastic institutions and schools have made significant improvements. Free sanitary napkins are provided to girls in schools and nunneries across Bhutan.

Reply to paragraph 25 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

163. Pursuant to Section 59 of the CCPA, 2011 a child in street situation will be supported by NCWC and other case management agencies. This will be done through the implementation of a SOP which focuses on systematic and timely direct support and referrals. Case management provides individualised, coordinated, holistic and multi-sectoral support.

Reply to paragraph 26 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

164. The RGoB accords the highest priority to the education sector as it believes that the country's quality of health, prosperity, happiness and progression hinges on the quality of its education. The Constitution of Bhutan mandates the State to provide free education up to tenth standard to all children of school going age and, ensure technical and professional education is made generally available, and that higher education is equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. The draft National Education Policy, once approved, will serve as an important policy decision for providing equitable, inclusive and quality education, and lifelong learning opportunities to all children. The current major reform initiatives aim to create an education system that efficiently delivers the required knowledge, skills and talents for the children of Bhutan and instil in them the positive qualities of responsibility, resourcefulness and productivity.

165. The MoESD has launched TVET programmes in mainstream schools as an elective and optional subject to expand access to technical education. Further, MoESD is implementing the revised 'School Discipline Policy Guidelines 2023' and adopting a comprehensive range of strategies as well as partnerships of school, family, and community for effective implementation. This guideline emphasises the need to create an inclusive environment, the importance of mutual respect and self-worth, by educating them with important life skills as children continue to change, grow and develop. The revised guideline will be implemented in all the schools including private schools.

Reply to paragraph 26 (b)&(c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

166. As mandated by the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, access to primary, secondary and higher secondary education is provided to all children irrespective of their location of residence, nationality and disability. To enhance access, the RGoB established central schools, inclusive schools for PwD, identified and trained special education teachers and provided opportunities for learning after leaving school. The establishment of central schools is an important intervention to improve the quality of education and provide a conducive environment to study for rural children, especially girls and children with disabilities. It is also expected to reduce the drudgery of travelling to and from schools for children and ensure their safety. As of 2020, there were 41,134 students enrolled in the central schools across the country, of which 21,595 were girls.

167. All middle secondary schools and higher secondary schools across the country have school guidance counsellors to take up the critical role of guiding, mentoring and providing psychosocial support services.

168. Many day schools across the country, particularly in rural areas, serve one to two meals a day to its students to encourage enrolment and attendance.

169. Access to education for those who missed the opportunity to avail formal education, mostly in the rural areas, is provided through the longstanding NFE program. In addition to basic literacy, the program also educates NFE students on life-skills, health and sanitation, and numeracy. As of July 2022, there were 3,162 female and 1,216 male NFE learners in 430 centres across the country.

170. Provision for children to avail the ECCD services for rural areas have been enhanced through the mobile ECCD Centres whereby ECCD services are catered by one facilitator dedicating a few days to each community. MoESD is also piloting Home Based Interventions for ECCD aged children for far flung areas that have too few children to qualify for a centre based ECCD Program.

Reply to paragraph 26 (d) of the list of issues prior to reporting

171. The MoESD has numerous interventions such as Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, school feeding programs, student resilience development and well-being programs to minimise school dropouts and repetition. To improve school readiness and better academic achievement, the RGoB has been emphasising on strengthening ECCD programs to enhance cognitive, language, and social-emotional development of children.

172. The MoESD is piloting the Adolescents Skills and Employability project/Upshift programme across 64 schools and 10 youth centres to equip young people with a new set of 21st century skills, transferable skills, and other high-level thinking skills such as communication skills, problem-solving, decision-making, negotiation skills, team building, and co-creating solutions to address social issues in communities. More than 74 focal and 4,639 upshifters have been orientated of which 2,496 are female, including out-of-school youth. To encourage applying skills and knowledge learnt and to scale up the upshift project, 12 potential projects out of 74 projects were shortlisted for a national innovation challenge. The top five ideas were provided with a Science for Equality Empowerment and Development (SEED) budget to scale up and connect with online mentorship programmes.

173. Schools and youth centres are implementing projects and relying on UNISOLVE, an online digital upshift programme, to enhance skills and knowledge of adolescents and young people. In 2023, the MoESD conducted the first ever capacity development for Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) to empower out-of-school adolescents and youth to harness opportunities to reach their full potential.

Reply to paragraph 26 (e) of the list of issues prior to reporting

174. Girls in Bhutan have higher net enrolment rate and survival rate compared to boys. The gender parity index is also in favour of girls up to Class XII. At the tertiary level, the

gender parity index for those currently studying in Bhutan is 1.06, and 1.02 for both studying outside and within Bhutan. To provide school leavers with an opportunity to upgrade their qualifications and promote lifelong learning, the MoESD initiated Continuing Education (CE). The program offers two-year courses for completion of classes X and XII. Currently, there are a total of 167 learners of which 93 are female.

175. The GPI for technical and vocational education stands at 0.41. To encourage girls' enrolment, gender-sensitive infrastructure with universal access design and courses have been established in selected training institutes. The MoESD is currently developing a strategy to promote gender participation in TVET.

176. The school curriculum for all classes and subjects have been reviewed and revised to make it more inclusive and gender sensitive based on the recommendations from relevant agencies and independent reviewers. The new curriculum eliminates illustrations that reinforce gender stereotypes. Additionally, a specific module on gender is integrated in the social studies curriculum for grade five with the objective of transforming gender stereotypical mindsets from a very young age.

Reply to paragraph 26 (f) of the list of issues prior to reporting

177. Recognizing the critical role of counsellors in providing Mental Health and Psycho-social Support (MHPSS) to students and young people, capacities of school guidance counsellors are enhanced through regular training on family intervention and PSS. Between 2020-2021, 177 counsellors (84 Female) were trained to provide PSS and MHPSS.

178. To support children in distress, one teacher from each school across Bhutan has been trained in PSS and identified as the PSS focal person. A referral mechanism has also been instituted to ensure proper and timely referral between the counsellors, MoESD and agencies such as the NCWC and relevant CSOs. In addition, the implementation of the SOP on child protection case management will further strengthen the referral mechanism. A guidance note to provide remote MPHSS and counselling was also developed and 147 counsellors trained on its use.

179. On 10 October, 2022, the PEMA launched the guidelines for anti-bullying in educational institutions. It aims to nurture a safe and harmonious learning environment for children and youth, enhance psychological well-being and resilience, and provide a reference for educational institutions to base their anti-bullying initiatives. Student representatives from schools took part in the development of the SOP for the anti-bullying mechanism.

180. The NCWC and the MoESD are implementing the 'Empowering Communities to Address Violence against Children' (*Dekyid Thundrel*) project as a pilot in Thimphu, Dagana and Zhemgang. The goal of the project is to empower parents, caregivers with positive parenting knowledge and skills. It will also mobilise communities and strengthen the child protection mechanism in schools and communities linked to the national Child Protection Services to ensure children are protected and nurturing environments established at all levels.

181. The Parenting without Violence toolkit has been contextualised to fit the Bhutanese context and equip parents and caregivers with knowledge and skills to address VAC by helping children and parents build positive relationships and positive communication. It also helps children build positive relationships with their peers at schools and empowers and builds their resilience and confidence.

Reply to paragraph 26 (g) of the list of issues prior to reporting

182. ECCD coverage is mentioned in para 26(d). The ECCD program in the country is provided through several modalities. RGoB funded projects include centre-based ECCD programs, mobile ECCD programs, and home-based interventions. Private operators provide programs on a fee payment basis. ECCD services are also provided by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and agencies and institutions provide workplace-based ECCD programs. As of 2022, there were 10,872 children (5,314 girls and 5,558 boys) enrolled in 491 ECCD centres across the country of which 422 were government ECCD centres and 69

non-governmental (Private, NGO, Workplace-based) ECCD centres. Information on creche modality and guideline is provided in para 11(a), Currently there are 27 creches in the country.

Reply to paragraph 27 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

183. It may be recalled and noted that the issue of the people in the camps in eastern Nepal is not a typical refugee situation and has its genesis in illegal immigration of economic migrants. There were different categories of people in the camps including non-Bhutanese people. The children in the camps in Nepal are beyond the territorial jurisdiction of Bhutan.

Reply to paragraph 27 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

184. Bhutan is committed to gradually accede to the human rights and other international instruments based on national state of readiness. Bhutan acceded to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children in February 2023. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been submitted to the Parliament for ratification.

Reply to paragraph 27 (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

185. As per the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, all persons are equal before the law and are entitled to equal and effective protection of the law and shall not be discriminated against on the grounds of race, sex, language, religion, politics or other status. Further, the Constitution requires the State to endeavour to take appropriate measures to ensure that children are protected against all forms of discrimination and exploitation and there are sufficient legal provisions to protect and promote children's rights and well-being. Therefore, all Bhutanese citizens enjoy equal rights and access to social services under the Constitution.

186. Free education is provided to all children of school going age up to tenth standard and the Constitution also requires the State to ensure that technical and professional education is made generally available and that higher education is equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

187. The State also provides free access to basic public health services to all and the right to freedom of religion is also guaranteed under the Constitution.

Reply to paragraph 28 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

188. The Regulations on Working Conditions under the Labour and Employment Act of Bhutan 2007, were revised in 2022 to incorporate and adopt international best practices in labour administration as well as to update relevant national laws. The labour law prohibits the employment of children aged 13-17 years. Approval of the Chief Labour Administrator must be sought for the employment of children to ensure that the nature of the work is not harmful to their physical and mental development.

189. The reporting system for labour related issues has been strengthened through the establishment of an online Labour Administration System whereby child labour issues are reported and addressed by the Department of Labour. Child labour cases are referred to and addressed jointly in consultation with the NCWC, RENEW as per the Child Protection and GBV Case Management SoP.

Reply to paragraph 28 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

190. The RGoB has undertaken a number of activities to ensure that families facing socioeconomic disadvantages receive adequate support and that their children are protected from child labour and sexual exploitation. Some of these activities are livelihood training and

income-generating activities, child protection services such as counselling and legal aid to children who have been abused or exploited, and establishing community-based child protection mechanisms involving local leaders and community members in identifying and responding to cases of abuse and neglect. Young people from economically challenged backgrounds have also received scholarships offered by CSOs, private educational institutions and corporate bodies mainly for vocational and college education.

191. Additionally, CSOs provide a comprehensive support package to both parents and children from disadvantaged communities. Services range from psycho-social support, shelter services, legal aid to scholarships for children, micro finance support and livelihood skills training to parents to help them reintegrate into the community.

192. The RGoB has also encouraged the establishment of microfinance institutions to expand access to finance for disadvantaged groups particularly women. For example, the RENEW microfinance program has benefited 26,014 people, of which 90% are women. Similarly, the Tarayana Foundation and BAOWE's group savings and lending scheme supported around 3,000 members, of which 70% are women.

193. The implementation of the CP and GBV case management SOP has made it possible to do comprehensive assessment and properly determine the support required by children in need of care and protection and at risk of being exploited.

Reply to paragraph 28 (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

194. Due to the vulnerability of *drayang* employees, particularly to sexual exploitation, social stigmatisation and discrimination, the RGoB directed the closure of *drayang*s in January 2022. Following the closure of *drayang*s, the MoICE initiated reintegration programs and 515 female employees registered for these programs. The programs included skilling courses (hair and beauty, tailoring and construction related trades); basic entrepreneurship course; and direct engagement/employment. Post-skilling support provided equipment and hand holding support for access to financing, mentoring, follow up and monitoring.

Reply to paragraph 29 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

195. Section 154 of the PCB related to TIP was amended in 2021 in line with the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons as follows: A defendant shall be guilty of an offence of trafficking in persons if the defendant recruits, transports, transfers, harbours or receives a person by means of the threat or use of force, or any other form of coercion, abduction, fraud or deception, the abuse of power, the abuse of the position of vulnerability, or the giving or receiving of payments or other benefit to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation. For the purpose of this Code, 'exploitation' includes, but not limited to, sexual exploitation, involuntary domestic servitude, forced labour, child labour and trafficking of human organs.

196. Bhutan acceded to the UNTOC and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (TIP Protocol) on 20 February 2023. Pursuant to Article 10(25) of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, the Convention and the TIP Protocol shall be deemed to be national laws unless inconsistent with the Constitution. Therefore, in the event of any ambiguity, the definition under the Convention and the TIP Protocol will also be referred to by the RCJ.

Reply to paragraph 29 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

197. Bhutan developed the SOP on Multi-sectoral Response to address TIP in Bhutan in 2019. Law enforcement officers, LG, government agencies, CSOs and volunteers were trained on TIP and the implementation of SOP. Law enforcement agencies such as the Judiciary, RBP, OAG and immigration officials were trained in investigating trafficking of children, prosecution and sanctioning. Relevant agencies were also trained in administration of justice, fair trial and access to justice, due process of law, international investigations

practices and processes, standard practices of scientific collection, and compilation of evidence from crime scenes and preparation of reports. 75 officials from the Judiciary including judges¹⁵, 171 police personnel, and 28 master trainers¹⁶ were trained between 2020 to 2023. More than 90% of the Labour and Immigration Inspectors have been trained in proactive identification of victims and reporting of TIP cases. Awareness programmes have been conducted in schools and communities covering over 20,000 people including children. Bhutan continues to train law enforcement and sensitise the general public on TIP.

Reply to paragraph 29 (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

198. The incidence of trafficking of children in Bhutan is minimal. The RGoB remains committed to prevent and respond to such issues. While there has not been a specific study conducted to understand the root causes of trafficking of children, a comprehensive assessment of the TIP situation was conducted in 2011. A similar assessment was conducted in 2020 but did not focus on the causes of trafficking. The current profile of the survivors suggests that individuals from economically disadvantaged families looking for employment opportunities in urban centres and abroad are vulnerable. The 2011 assessment also suggests lack of awareness as one of the risk factors. Therefore, the RGoB has been focusing on prevention of child trafficking through awareness programmes. Over 52 programmes covering around 15,000¹⁷ students were conducted.

Reply to paragraph 29 (d) of the list of issues prior to reporting

199. The SOP on Multi-sectoral Response to TIP is a significant step towards instituting a systematic mechanism to address the issue. It outlines specific procedures for identification, referral, protection and recovery of survivors. A special task team of law enforcement and specialised service providers was formed to support implementation of the SOP and improve coordination among agencies. Law enforcement and specialised service providers were trained in managing cases of TIP as reported in response to para 29 (b).

200. Further, the National Prevention and Response Strategy was launched in 2022 to enhance the mechanism to deal with TIP including strengthening bilateral, regional and multilateral coordination for effective prevention, protection and repatriation of TIP survivors as well as creating meaningful engagement for youths to prevent trafficking. The strategy is also accompanied by an action plan with various interventions to be implemented by relevant agencies over the next three years.

Reply to paragraph 30 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

201. The multisectoral SoP on CICL is being implemented by the Justice sector. Recognising the emerging protection issues related to women and children and the need for proper mechanisms and systems, the SOP on Case Management for CICL was reviewed to ensure the provision of effective, appropriate, systematic and timely services to prevent and respond to the protection issues faced by children who come in conflict with the law and also in contact with the law. The SOP contains integral roles and responsibilities including accountability of all the stakeholders involved in dealing with children in contact with the law.

202. The Legal Aid Center was established in October 2022 to allow equal access to the justice system. The Center provides advice, assistance and representation services to applicants with a special focus on CICL. The Center is collaborating with the Jigme Singye Wangchuck Law School (JSWL) to develop child friendly legal aid services.

¹⁵ 56 male and 19 female.

¹⁶ 14 male and 14 female from agencies such as NCWC, RBP, OAG, DLO, Department of Immigration, BNLI and MoHCA.

¹⁷ 6,759 males and 8,227 females.

203. To enhance the child justice system, OAG has developed and is implementing the Child Friendly Prosecution Guidelines 2017, and the Diversion Guidelines 2017. The OAG has also developed a training manual on Child Justice in 2022.

Reply to paragraph 30 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

204. In line with the CCPA, the justice sector agencies developed the SOP on Case Management for Children in Conflict with the Law to enhance coordination amongst relevant agencies including CSOs working for CICL. The SOP ensures that CICL are provided with restorative measures and reintegration support. Since 2017, more than 714 children in conflict with the law have undergone diversion community service, and other alternatives to sentencing.

205. CSOs working towards reintegrating and rehabilitating of CICL, have provided diversion services to 357 children since 2018. A Diversion Handbook has been developed in collaboration with the JSWL to streamline the process of diversion. Community service mapping for diversion of CICL has also been conducted in eight districts and will be done nationwide. The diversion services are inclusive of a wide range of community service options, vocational training opportunities and soft skills development programmes and towards this NL is partnering with 54 government agencies, CSOs, social enterprises, religious organisations, the education sector and community groups for providing diversion services to CICL.

Reply to paragraph 30 (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

206. Section 5 of CCPA ensures that deprivation of a child's liberty will be used as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible time. The CCPA, as the special law pertaining to children, is applied with regards to sentencing of children. Additionally, the RCJ adopted Sentencing Guidelines, 2022 that also mandates custodial sentencing to be a measure of last resort for CICL.

207. In line with the SoP on Children in Contact with the Law, a CICL is referred to the NCWC for assessment based on which, the child can be released on surety/bail. Since 2017, more than 157 children have benefitted from such measures, of which more than 98% are boys.

Reply to paragraph 30 (d) of the list of issues prior to reporting

208. In line with the CCPA of Bhutan, children and adults are not detained together unless it is unavoidable. Since 2007, the RBP established separate detention centres for women and children and RBP divisions across the country have separate women and children-friendly desks ensuring children have access to child-friendly police services.

209. Pre-trial detention centres for minors have also been established in Thimphu and Phuentsholing, the country's two largest urban centres. These centres have different rooms for boys and girls, a separate kitchen and provision for outdoor games and other activities.

Reply to paragraph 30 (e) of the list of issues prior to reporting

210. The RBP through the Youth Development and Rehabilitation Centre provides vocational skills, training, education and counselling as a part of rehabilitative and reformatory programmes. While at the facility, children are provided with soft skills development programmes inclusive of parenting programmes, leadership training, music and art therapy and site visits to vocational and educational institutions.

211. The Institute of Well-being provides quality treatment and rehabilitation services to all drug and alcohol dependent young people, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and offers support and counselling to families affected by substance use disorders. Livelihood and skills development areas include ecotourism, eco-

friendly construction of houses, Bhutanese art and crafts, and other value-added skills such as food processing.

212. NL provides reintegration and rehabilitation services to children released from the Youth Development and Rehabilitation Centre upon completion of their sentences. NL assists in reintegration by providing education support, vocational training and livelihood support to establish micro businesses. Since 2018, NL has provided reintegration services to 51 children.

Reply to paragraph 31 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

213. Section 9 of the Labour and Employment Act of Bhutan 2007, states that no child should be subject to any forms of illegal practices such as sale, debt bondage, forced labour, recruitment for armed conflict, child prostitution or pornography and unfavourable work conditions and treatments. The offence of child exploitation is a felony of a third degree. The Information, Communications and Media Act has specific sections that define and grade transmitting obscene communications including that of children. The Act also clearly defines obscene material and information. Such actions are liable for an offence of abetting as per the PCB which is graded as a felony of a fourth degree.

Reply to paragraph 31 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

214. Section 9 of the Tourism Policy 2021 mandates the Tourism Council of Bhutan to prevent any forms of exploitation of vulnerable groups including women and children in the tourism sector, facilities and establishments. Refer to response provided under para 11 & para 31(a).

Reply to paragraph 31 (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

215. The Mutual Legal Assistance Bill has been finalised and submitted to the RGoB in 2022 for submission to the Parliament. With adoption of this legislation, international cooperation in the areas of legal assistance in criminal matters is expected to further enhance judicial assistance in criminal investigations and proceedings.

216. Further, following the ratification of UNTOC and the TIP Protocol in February 2023, RGoB will follow the Convention on matters related to international cooperation, in particular matters related to the prevention, investigation, and prosecution of serious offences that are transnational in nature and involves an organised criminal group that engages in criminal activities in the state or in more than one state.

Reply to paragraph 31 (d) of the list of issues prior to reporting

217. The NCWC has developed the guideline on early identification and safe referral of child protection issues which has been used to train more than 700 front liners and people working with children. Children in need of protection and care are identified and referred to the case management agencies for support services. Till date more than 600 children (340 Female) have been referred and availed of child protective services.

218. As per section 21 of the PCB, the Court may, in addition to the sentence awarded under the provisions of the Penal Code, order restitution, recovery, confiscation, of any property or article or may order the payment of any appropriate damages or compensatory damages for the injury, loss, damage or the value of what the victim had been parted or deprived of being possessed.

Reply to paragraph 31 (e) of the list of issues prior to reporting

219. Section 59 (4) of the CCPA defines a CIDC who is being or likely to be abused or exploited for immoral or illegal purposes. All victims of offences covered by the Optional Protocol will be considered as a CIDC. The Act also mandates the duty bearer to provide subsequent care and assistance, including psycho-social services, necessary legal assistance, remedies, and support for their recovery and social reintegration. The Act also mandates the Central and Local Government, educational institutions, community and families to provide all necessary support required by a child in need of care and protection.

220. Similarly, as per the SOP on Child Protection Case Management, any child in need of protection will be provided case management and other services for his or her recovery. See response to para 30(a) and 19(f).

Reply to paragraph 32 (a) of the list of issues prior to reporting

221. The NCWC in collaboration with CSO partners and government agencies regularly conduct awareness programmes, including that of child rights, in the context of optional protocols for the general public including armed forces.

222. NCWC has also conducted several rounds of training on the CRC and the Optional Protocols to the CRC for officials of government and non-government agencies. A training manual has been developed to build the capacity of relevant personnel including volunteers on the CRC and its Optional Protocols.

Reply to paragraph 32 (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

223. Section 9 of the LEA 2007, specifically prohibits recruitment of children in any form of practices such as sale and trafficking, debt bondage, forced or compulsory labour, including recruitment for use in armed conflict amongst others. Such offences are graded as a felony of the third degree with a sentence term of five to less than nine years, which can be increased if aggravating circumstances exist.

III. Statistical information and data

224. Refer statistical information and data annexure for responses to paragraph 35 to 47.
