



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

Distr.: General  
10 August 2022

Original: English  
English, French and Spanish only

---

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

**Ninth periodic report submitted by Sri Lanka under article  
18 of the Convention, due in 2021\***

[Date received: 22 April 2022]

---

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



**Abbreviations**

ASIG	AusAid Skills for Inclusive Growth
CBO	Community Based Organization
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CEPA	Centre for Poverty Analysis
CTF	Consultation Task Force
DCS	Department of Census and Statistics
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DOL	Department of Labour
DV Act	Domestic Violence Act
EPF/ETF	Employees Provident Fund/Employees Trust Fund
EFC	Employer's Federation of Ceylon
EU	European Union
FBR	Family Background Report
FHH	Female Headed Households
FTZ	Free Trade Zone
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GCE A/L	General Certificate in Education, Advanced Level
GCE O/L	General Certificate in Education, Ordinary Level
GN	GramaNiladri
GNI	Gross National Income
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka
HDI	Human Development Index
ILO	International Labour Organization
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IT	Information Technology
MMDA	Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act
MOFE	Ministry of Foreign Employment
MOH	Ministry of Health
MWCA	Ministry of Women and Child Affairs
NAITA	National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority
NAP	National Action Plan
NCW	National Committee on Women

---

NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NSACP	National STD/AIDS Control Programme
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifier
NHRAP	National Human Rights Action Plan
ONUR	Organization of National Unity and Reconciliation
PHM	Public Health Midwife
RMNCAYH	Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child Adolescent and Youth Health
SLBFE	Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment
SME	Small Medium Enterprises
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SLBFE	Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment
SMWCDPSE	State Ministry of Women & Child Development, Pre-schools and Primary Education, School Infrastructure and Education Services
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
SCRM	Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanism
TVEC	Tertiary & Vocational Education Commission
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
WDF	Women Development Federation
WDO	Women Development Officers
WDS	Women Development Societies
WHH	Women Headed Households
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

## Introduction

1. The Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, (GoSL), is pleased to present its Ninth (9th) Periodic Report in terms of its obligation under Article 18 of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, setting out developments, achievements, and progress relevant to the period from 2016 to 2021.

2. Sri Lanka with its commitment to realize the rights of all women and girls and to ensure gender equal development in the country records high achievement in the social, economic, and political arenas. Gender equality is guaranteed by the 1978 Constitution through the following articles:

- Article 12(1): All persons are equal before law and are entitled to the equal protection of law;
- Article 12(2): No citizen shall be discriminated against on the grounds of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion, place of birth, or any one of such grounds;
- Article 12 (4) of the Constitution enables special provisions to be made by law, subordinate legislation or executive action for the advancement of women.

3. In compliance with articles stipulated in the Constitution of Sri Lanka and in realizing the commitment made to the international human rights instruments such as CEDAW, the laws and policies of Sri Lanka have given due consideration to promote gender equality. The legal framework in Sri Lanka is in place to protect women and girls from sexual violence and in respect to many offences such as murder, rape, sexual abuse and harassment, incest, trafficking and child abuse. Sri Lanka has shown significant progress towards eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres in line with SDG target 5.2.1. The SDGs are part and parcel of the national policy and implementation agenda.

4. The policies and action plans such as Education Ordinance Act No. 31 of 1939, Maintenance Act No. 37 of 1990, Sex Disqualification Removal (legal profession) Ordinance of No. 25 of 1933, National Human Rights Action Plan 2017-2021, Multi-Sectoral National Action Plan to Address SGBV are to name a few legislative enactments, policies and plans that uphold gender equality.

5. The Women's Rights Chapter of the Human Rights Action Plan (2017-2021) was developed based on the Concluding Observations given by the CEDAW Committee on the 8<sup>th</sup> periodic report. In line with this plan, the State has taken preliminary measures to repeal the discriminatory provisions in the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act among other law reforms.

6. The Cabinet has approved the proposal submitted by the Cabinet Ministry of Education dated 19th September 2020 on establishing a National Policy to collect sex and age disaggregated data and information. Collecting sex and age disaggregated data and information has become vital and a timely requirement for designing development programs for women and children under the national policy framework: Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor, monitoring and gauging the performance of those programs and achieving Sustainable Development Goals related to gender.

7. Women's representation in Local Government bodies has risen to 22% in 2018 with the introduction of a quota for women. Advocacy mechanisms have been strengthened to request for quota for women in the Parliament and in Provincial Councils.

## National Machinery for the advancement of women

8. During the period 2016- 2021, the Cabinet Ministry of Women & Child Affairs (MWCA) mainly engaged in developing and implementing policies and action plans to promote gender equality and women empowerment. MWCA also coordinated with the line ministries

and provincial, districts, and division structures to ensure gender equality in their programmes and plans. MWCA secured the approval of the Cabinet in 2016 for a sectoral gender mainstreaming mechanism that covered all major development sectors and line ministries. The mechanism included establishment of Gender Focal Points at the level of Additional Secretaries, building sectoral staff capacities on gender mainstreaming and gender responsive planning & budgeting and establishment of anti-sexual harassment committees within the line Ministries. The MWCA along with the Department of National Budget has developed 12 Key Performance Indicators in relation to SDG 5 to be used in preparing the Annual Budget in 2018. Gender Responsive Budget guidelines were drafted by the Finance Commission to be used in preparing the annual action plans of the Provincial Councils. Affirmative action was taken by MWCA to ensure 25% of annual rural development budget for economic empowerment of women since 2016. In 2017, the Cabinet approval was secured for a National Policy Framework and Action Plan on Women Heads of Households which is now being implemented.

9. It has recently been observed that an integral part of the national development process in Sri Lanka is the implementation and regulation of development programmes from the national level to the rural level through a well-coordinated and integral approach. The National policy on Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor is the development plan which guides this integrated development approach where gender is mainstreamed in all sectors. (Please refer page 54 and 55 of Common Core Document).

10. Since mid-2020, with the change of Government in July 2020, a State Ministry of Women and Child Development Preschools and Primary Education School Infrastructure and Education Services (SMWCDPSE) was established under the Cabinet Ministry of Education to ensure gender equality and women empowerment in Sri Lanka. According to the Gazette notification issued in August 2020, the functions of SMWCDPSE are: i. Implementing a program to ensure the security of women, ii. Providing relief to rural women victimized by unregulated microfinance schemes, iii. Implementing permanent mechanisms to provide protection and minimize adversities to persons subjected to regular vulnerabilities, especially women and children. SMWCDPSE is mandated to carry out an integrated approach to the advancement of women's rights and gender equality by coordinating with key sectoral ministries at national and district levels and reach out to women at the grassroots. A monitoring and accountability checking methodology is also in place to ensure that the planned activities are properly implemented and benefit women.

### **Impact of Covid-19 pandemic**

11. The spread of Covid 19 in the country was first identified in March 2020. With the lockdown for more than a month, the spread of the pandemic was curtailed successfully by the Government. The second wave took place in October 2020, which was first identified in a garment factory and later spread to most parts of the country. The third wave took place in July and August 2021 which claimed the most number of lives. Sri Lanka has recorded 658,493 Covid 19 cases and 16,436 deaths up to 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2022.<sup>1</sup>

12. The current pandemic has imposed a heavier burden on female healthcare workers including nurses and midwives. It has slowed down the pace of progress of development activities in the country and impacted the programmes aiming at empowerment of women. The pandemic has impacted on women's security and income. Statistics have revealed increase of incidences of violence against women and children as a result of restricted mobility. Complaints received by the Hotlines in operation were increased during the lockdown period. The 1938 Helpline of the National Women's Committee was extended up to 24 hours to receive the complaints made by the affected women. The number of cases reported on both offences on

<sup>1</sup> <https://hpb.health.gov.lk/covid19-dashboard/>.

family disputes and Domestic Violence (DV) have increased from 1173 in 2019 to 2324 cases in 2020.

13. Majority of females (51%) working in the informal sector in casual employment and self-employment were affected due to loss of income. The government has provided medical support to the population while an allowance of Rs. 5000 was given in two consecutive terms to vulnerable families.

## **Responses to Concluding Observations**

14. Actions taken and results achieved in respect of principle areas of concern and recommendations of the Committee [ref. Paragraph 'c' of the concluding observations ([CEDAW/C/LKA/CO/7](#))].

**Legal status of the Convention: The Committee reiterates its previous recommendation ([CEDAW/C/LKA/CO/7](#), para. 13) that the State party incorporates all provisions of the Convention into national law without further delay**

### **Legal Framework for prohibition of discrimination against women**

15. The Constitution of the Republic of Sri Lanka recognizes that every person has the right to equality and every citizen has the right to be free from discrimination. The Fundamental Rights Chapter in the Constitution recognizes the right to equality and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex under Article 12 (1) and 12 (2). Article 27 of the Constitution ensures State obligation in guaranteeing equal opportunity and prevention of exploitation for all citizens. Principles of equality and prohibition of discrimination based on gender have been adequately dealt with in the Constitution. Article 12 (4) provides for affirmative action to realize women's rights to equality and nondiscrimination.

16. In addition to the Constitution, Sri Lanka has enacted several legislative enactments giving effect to the provisions of the CEDAW including criminal law and other legislative enactment and regulations. The civil societies and the public had the opportunity of forwarding their submissions including on incorporation of provisions under CEDAW into the proposed new Constitution, to the Public Representation Committee.

### *Ensure women's full participation in the process of drafting the new Constitution*

17. In 2016, when public views were called for the new Constitution, a large number of women's organizations made submissions to the Public Representation Committee covering all areas of the Constitution and emphasized the importance of ensuring the supremacy of a rights-based Constitution which would allow for both the protection of women's rights as well as provide a basis for legal action in the event of any discrimination. On the whole, women's groups highlighted the need for a Constitution to deal with the issue of nondiscrimination, protection of citizens from violence and socio-economic wellbeing of citizens. The Public Representation Committee included two women representatives.

18. In October 2020, the present Government appointed a nine-member expert committee to draft a new Constitution. The nine-member expert committee comprised of both women and men. The public has been invited to submit their proposals under nine themes including Fundamental Rights. As in the previous occasion, the women's groups were given the opportunity to submit their proposals to the Committee appointed. The Committee expects to release the draft Constitution soon.

*Include sexual orientation and gender identity as a prohibited ground for discrimination*

19. Sexual orientation and gender identity were included in the submissions made by the public to the Constitutional reforms in 2016 and in the submissions made by the Committee on Fundamental Rights.

*Incorporate into domestic legislation, the principle of equality and non-discrimination*

20. The principles enshrined in the CEDAW on women's rights and nondiscrimination was incorporated into the draft Bill on Establishing a Women's Commission.

*Repeal Article 16(1) of the Constitution to introduce judicial review of all laws*

21. The expert committee appointed by His Excellency the President to draft the new Constitution will look into the Repealing of Article 16 (1) of the Constitution. In addition, a subcommittee is appointed by the Ministry of Justice to look into the civil law reforms which are complimentary to the new constitutional development. Subsequent to wide ranging discussions held with concerned stakeholders, academics and jurists, it is also proposed to amend the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act to introduce changes inter alia, to areas such as the age of marriage, registration requirements, qualifications for appointment of quazis and consent for marriage etc.

*Adopt and implement policies and programs which address intersectional discrimination including caste-based discrimination*

22. In the formulation of the draft National Women's Policy of Sri Lanka (2019) specific attention was drawn to investigate intersectionality of women's rights issues structured by areas such as ethnicity, social class, caste that may require additional policy interventions. This national policy is expected to be submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers for approval.

**Discriminatory laws***Repeal Discriminatory provisions in the Land Development Ordinance*

23. Proposals were made to make amendments to the succession schedule of the Land Development Ordinance and change the provision for the eldest son as a sole successor to include the eldest daughter in the event that a successor is not nominated. As a result, the Ministry of Land arrived at the following decision on the removal of discriminatory provision in the land development ordinance in relation to succession, inheritance and joint ownership which has been approved by the cabinet on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January 2021. The amendment is as follows: "According to the ordinance there was lesser priority given to women when bestowing land, gender equality is to be resolved in this regard. In an event where the succession is not nominated; the person who has developed or in occupancy or in possession of the property or who has the certificate, or the donation given in their name gets the ownership of the land. The names of the adopted children are also to be included in the entitlement schedule".

*Amend all Personal Laws, including the Muslim, Kandyan and Tesawalamai Personal Laws, to remove discriminatory provisions*

24. The Cabinet of Ministers has approved necessary amendments to the Civil Procedure Code (CPC), No. 2 of 1889 as amended, to allow Muslims to marry under the Marriage Registration Ordinance, No. 19 of 1907 as amended. An advisory committee was appointed by the Minister of Justice to look into areas where the Muslim Marriage laws should be amended to fall in line with the General Marriages Ordinance. Currently, the Legal Draftsman is in the process of drafting the relevant amendment. The General Marriages Ordinance which prohibited for Muslims to marry under the said law is to be amended providing option for those who prefer to marry under the General Law.

25. Further, there is a proposal for the Kandyan Marriages and Divorces Act to be amended in order to bring it in line with the General Marriages Ordinance regarding the minimum age of marriage.

26. The Ministry of Justice has appointed three separate Committees to make recommendations to reform criminal law, civil law and commercial law in 2020. An Advisory Committee was appointed to review and make recommendations to reform the family law under civil law reforms. The said Committee comprised 13 members out of which 8 are female legal experts.

### **Access to justice**

*Provide systematic capacity-building to judges, prosecutors, lawyers, the police and other law enforcement officials on the Convention*

27. In order to enhance knowledge of gender equality on the part of law enforcement officials and legal practitioners, training in human rights including women's rights is made an integral part of the curriculum for members of Police at the time of recruitment, promotion and as part of regular capacity building while in service. Human rights and humanitarian principles and International Conventions including CEDAW form part of the curricula of the training programmes of the Police Academy. The curriculum of the Police training institutes also includes the United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officers. The Police academy conducts annual TOT programmes on human rights including CEDAW which trickle down to the Police service members through the master trainers.

28. A majority of the prosecutors of the Attorney General's Department are females and at all times it is ensured that all prosecutors adhere to international best practices in maintaining a gender-sensitive approach in conducting prosecutions. The dossiers received from the Police on sexual violence cases are being handled by two main sections of the Attorney General's Department named (i) The Unit against sexual violence on children (CH Unit) and (ii) Criminal Division. There are 23 female Attorneys attached to the CH Unit evaluating the notes of investigation received from the police. The observations and recommendations of the said Attorneys are being vetted by a cadre of 16 supervising officers out of which 3 are females. Two of the supervising officers are trilingual. Evaluation and analysis of investigative material relating to sexual violence of females of 18 years and above, are being attended to by the officers of the permanent cadre. They are from the Criminal Division of the Department supervising the advice files on sexual offences against women (SOW) under different provincial-subject classifications. The strength of the officers of the Criminal Division is 122 and 54 of them are females. The indictments from the CH Unit and the Criminal Division on sexual abuse cases are referred to the High Court and the accused persons before the High Court are being prosecuted by the officers of the Criminal Division and are stationed in different provinces. In December 2018, the Attorney General's Department recruited 50 new State Counsels to its permanent cadre, out of which 27 State Counsels are females.

29. The Attorneys of the Unit against sexual violence on children\_(CH Unit) and the prosecutors in different stations are being trained on a continuous basis with the intention of encouraging them to be impartial in their decisions and conduct, outstanding in their professional career and promote gender sensitivity as means of safeguarding women's rights. The senior officials of the AG's Department and the experts from different forensic disciplines including psychologists, contribute immensely to the capacity building. The Government in collaboration with UNDP, has conducted several programs aiming to build human rights enforcement capacity among police, prosecutors, lawyers and prison officers. Certificate courses on addressing SGBV have been conducted by the Sri Lankan Police Academy since 2015 under the UNDP supported programmes.



30. Key human rights related Conventions including the CEDAW are taught in programs conducted for Army personnel at the Kotalawala Defense University where many military cadets pursue degree programs.

31. In 2017, the MWCA has conducted two capacity building programs for Magistrates on CEDAW principles and the Domestic Violence Act No. 34 of 2005. Altogether 129 Magistrates participated in this programme. 120 Family Counsellors responsible for monitoring of the Protection Orders given under the Domestic Violence Act of 2005 have also been trained on the implementation of Domestic Violence Act and on International Instruments in 2018.

*Increase the number of Tamil-speaking judicial enforcement officers in the North and East of the country*

32. In addressing the language barriers faced by women wishing to claim their rights, in particular Tamil and Muslim women, Tamil speaking prosecutors are appointed to all high courts in the North & East as a practice throughout. Government officers working in Northern and Eastern Provinces are predominantly Tamil. Therefore, language is not an issue for women to negotiate with these officers to claim their rights and on their socio- economic needs.

33. The Attorney General's Department has deployed prosecutors in the following High Courts situated in the Northern and Eastern Provinces:

- Northern province - 1. Jaffna, 2. Mannar, 3. Vavunia, 4. Kilinochchi (still not functioning);
- Eastern Province - 5. Trincomalee, 6. Batticaloa, 7. Kalmunei, 8. Ampara. Out of 7 High Courts that are currently functioning, the prosecutors in 6 High Courts (except in Ampara) are Tamil speaking.

*Enhance women's legal literacy and raise awareness on the part of women and men of their rights*

34. The MWCA reaches out to the SGBV affected communities through the Women and Children's Units established at the 340 Divisional Secretariats with five officers attached to each unit. Thirty-five such units are in operation in the North & East. The officers attached to the unit engage in issues related to GBV, providing counseling and attending to the socio-economic needs of the affected women. As part of prevention of SGBV, regular educational and awareness programs are also conducted by these units. The Women & Child Units are institutionalized as an intervention mechanism in violations of women and child rights through a circular by MWCA. Women also have access to the Police Women and Children's Units headed by a female police officer. The Police Women and Children's Units facilitate women to report on incidents of SGBV. The outreach to communities of women seeking redress and claiming their right to physical integrity is well established in Sri Lanka.

35. The SGBV prevention and intervention response include services by Women and Child Unit of the MWCA Counseling Unit at the Divisional Secretariat, health professionals and volunteers at the MithuruPiyasa/NatpuNilayam befriending clinics in state hospitals, women officers of the police women and child desks, and Attorneys -at-Law of the Legal Aid Commission and NGOs.

36. Para legal training will be provided to all WDOs and Counsellors who are engaged in activities connected with gender-based violence by using a comprehensive handbook developed with technical support from UNDP. Additionally, a Law Directory was prepared in all three languages to be used by the legal sector as well as service providers working on GBV and promoting women's rights.

37. The Women's Bureau that has outreached to grass root level continuously conduct awareness programs on legal literacy and women's rights for the communities. During 2020, 2723 have participated in these programmes. The Women's Bureau which comes under the

purview of State Ministry of Women and Child Development, Pre-School & Primary Education, School Infrastructure and Education Services Sri Lanka facilitates social and economic empowerment of women through provision of awareness and other socio economic support to rural women.

38. In addition to the WDS activities, raising awareness on gender equality and women's rights is widely conducted by the CSOs, NGOs, UN agencies and EU which support comprehensive and extensive sensitization on gender equality. NGOs have raised awareness on SGBV, services of safe homes with temporary shelter facilities, and legal aid services. Referral mechanisms are strengthened at divisional and district levels through networking and alliance building among CSOs.<sup>2</sup>

### **Women, peace and security – Transitional justice mechanisms**

*Fully involve women at all stages of the post-conflict reconstruction process in line with resolution 1325 (2000) and implement the Consultation Task Force recommendations*

39. In 2016, the then Government appointed 11-member Consultation Task Force (CTF) comprising entirely of civil society members to lead the public consultations on the design and implementation process of the mechanisms for truth seeking, justice, reparation and non-recurrence. The report of the CTF which was handed over in 2017 contains a number of recommendations pertaining to safeguarding the rights of women, particularly those affected by the conflict. Accordingly, the report contains separate segments on Gender and Reparations, the importance of gender sensitivity in respect of the truth, reconciliation and non-recurrence commission and the inclusion of women in the said process.<sup>3</sup> An Office of Reparation under Reparation Act No.34 of 2018 is established and is in operation to provide for individual and collective reparations. The Office of Missing Persons was established in February 2018 to trace and search for the missing persons. The National Policy on Reconciliation adopted in 2017 has identified empowering vulnerable groups affected by the conflict including female heads of households, war widows and survivors of gender-based violence. The Policy on Durable Solutions has focused on women's right to property, right to self-development, access to health care including reproductive and psycho- social care.

40. The Organization of National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) has implemented interventions on language education, political dialogue for reconciliation, setting up grievance units and supporting women by issuance of certificate of absence. CSOs have conducted grass root level peace building and reconciliation programmes with specific focus on economic needs of women, exclusion from inheritance, loss of property rights and lack of access to land.

41. The National Human Rights Action plan (NHRAP) (2017-2021) contains several transitional justice mechanisms including poverty reduction, provision of information on missing persons, eliminating sexual exploitation and violence against women, and introducing a sensitive transitional justice process. The Action Plan on Women Headed Households which was approved by the Cabinet in 2019, focuses on health and psychosocial support, livelihood development, support services systems, protection, social security, national level policy formulation, and awareness building. All these national action plans have received Cabinet approval and are in the process of implementation.

42. An Action Plan for the implementation of the Security Council Resolution 1325 has been developed by the MWCA with Technical Support from UN Women in 2020. The National Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) aims at:

- Increasing meaningful participation of women in all aspects of national life, including peace and security;

---

<sup>2</sup> Information shared by the Women Development Center Kandy.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.gov.lk/documents-reports>.

- Protecting women’s safety and well-being through addressing their needs, priorities and rights during and post conflict and emergency situations;
- Building and strengthening capacities of communities, Government institutions to promote social cohesion and prevent violence, terrorism and crimes;
- Facilitating relief and recovery of women and girl children affected by conflict contexts;
- Contributing towards achieving gender equality and SDGs by ensuring inclusive, responsive participatory and representative decision making at all levels.

43. These goals align with the Government National Policy framework “Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor 2020-2025“. This Policy Framework outlines ten policies out of which five have direct relevance to the activities envisaged in the WPS agenda which includes: i. Priority to national security, ii. An administration free from corruption, iii. Productive citizenry and a vibrant human resource, iv. People centric economic development and v. Disciplined, law-abiding and value-based society. The activities included in the National Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security are incorporated into the annual plans and budgets of SMWCDPSE.

*Ensure international participation in the accountability mechanism*

44. Taking into consideration domestic priorities and in accordance with the mandate received by H.E the President at the Presidential Election in 2019, Sri Lanka announced its decision to withdraw from co-sponsorship of Resolution 40/1 on ‘Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka’ which also incorporates and builds on preceding Resolutions 30/1 of October 2015 and 34/1 of March 2017. With regard to resolution 30/1, the GoSL wishes to highlight that Sri Lanka’s withdrawal from the said resolution was based on the serious constitutional, substantive and procedural issues which the country and its people had to encounter pursuant to the then Government’s decision to co-sponsor the resolution without the concurrence of the Parliament on a matter concerning the sovereignty of the nation and in contravention of its Constitution.

45. Sri Lanka rejects the establishment of an external evidence gathering mechanism when domestic remedies have not been exhausted and processes are ongoing. The international community is well aware that without the consent and cooperation of the country concerned such external accountability mechanisms are subject to politicization and cannot achieve their stated human rights objectives.

*Expedite the review and amendment of the Assistance to and Protection of Victims of Crimes and Witnesses Act*

46. The Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Act was amended by the Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses (Amendment) Act No. 27 of 2017 to facilitate recording of evidence from any remote location outside Sri Lanka.

**National machinery for the advancement of women**

*Consolidate and strengthen the various existing action plans into one cohesive strategy*

47. An overarching National Policy on Women is prepared by MWCA with support from donor agencies and academia. This overarching policy includes the strategic areas of i. Education and information communication technology, ii. Health and wellbeing iii. Law and administration of justice, iv. Environment, v. Labour, vi. Media, and vii. Political participation. This policy has taken into consideration the Women’s Charter of 1993 that outlined 7 areas for policy and programmatic action. However, the draft policy has gone beyond the Women’s Charter and has incorporated the significant changes that occurred since 1993 and has taken into consideration the SDG agenda 2030 as well. The national policy on women is currently being finalized by MWCA and will be presented to the Cabinet for approval.

48. National Action Plans are prepared with different objectives under different sectors to ensure gender equality and as coordinated by the Ministry. For example, the Action Plan on Women Headed Households was prepared by the UN Theme Group with MWCA. The Action Plan on Sexual and Gender Based Violence was prepared with the technical assistance by the UNDP along with 13 sector-based Ministries and affiliated agencies and civil society organizations.

49. SMWCDPSE also ensures that other sectoral policies have mainstreamed gender equality as a key cross-cutting area, for example, National Disaster Policy, National Human Resource Development Policy, and National SME policy. Considering the need for area focused attention and the need to take into account the special vulnerabilities among women, specific plans are developed for Women Headed Households and National Action Plan to address SGBV.

*Within a specific timeframe, ensure the legislative establishment and effective functioning of an independent National Commission on Women*

50. Since 2000, successive governments have initiated action to establish an independent Women's Commission to protect, promote and ensure respect for women's rights and to ensure formal and substantive equality and justice for women. Consequently, a new Bill was drafted to establish an independent Women's Commission and Cabinet approval was obtained in 2017. After the scrutiny of the legal draftsman, the Bill was then forwarded to the Attorney General (AG) for his concurrence. The observations from the AG were received in March 2018. Accordingly, the Bill was revised to give effects to women's rights as articulated in the Constitution and in CEDAW. One of the objectives of the draft Bill "is to give effect to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its General Recommendations as well as other international human rights and standards on women rights." However, on the recommendations of the Attorney General to submit a re-drafted bill, the State Ministry of Women and Child Development has appointed a committee consists with higher officials of the Ministry and the National Committee on Women to study the recommendations and observations of the AG's Department and decide on how to proceed on establishment of the independent National Commission on Women.

*Ensure the active participation of civil society and the National Commission on Women in the monitoring and assessment of the consolidated action plan on the advancement of women's rights in the State party*

51. Consultations were conducted with the participation of civil society groups working on developing the National Policy on Women and in drafting the Bill on Establishing the National Commission on Women. Civil society members are invited for all the review meetings of Action Plans and their comments have been considered in the drafting process.

### **Temporary special measures**

*Quota for increasing women political participation*

52. It is observed that the progress made by women in socio- economic fields is not reflected in their participation in politics. Women's groups have advocated for a quota for women in political bodies for a long period of time through conducting island wide awareness raising, and media campaigns. With the view of increasing political representation of women in the second and third tiers of government, a 25% quota for women was included in the Local Government bodies by amending the Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Act, No. 1 of 2016. Accordingly, a quota of 25 % for women was included in the manifestoes of the political parties.

This has helped in the outcome of an increase to 22% of participation of women by 2018 from the previously held 1.9% (2014) of women in Local Government bodies.<sup>4</sup>

*Special budget allocations for women's economic empowerment*

53. Women in the informal sector work as unpaid family workers are higher compared to men. Estimated GNI per capita (2011 PPP \$) -females 7433 and males 18,423 (2018 females 6,766 and 16852 for males). GNI per capita of females is much lower than that of males right through the reporting period. In order to enhance the income of the informal sector women, the Cabinet Memorandum of 15/1983/740/005 dated 18.12.2015 submitted by Hon. Minister of Women and Child Affairs was approved by the Cabinet on 09.03.2016 calling upon the specially selected Ministries and all provincial councils to reserve minimum of 25% of all the allocations made for rural development for the development of women and for their economic advancement. This circular disseminated in addendum to the 2017 budget call brought about significant results.

54. For example, out of the total annual budget of the Eastern Province, 16.3% was allocated for women's development activities and in addressing gender gaps in 2017. Categorically under the Local Government and Rural Development budget the allocation in 2017 for women's economic empowerment was nearly 45% i.e. SLRS 157 MN. The tourist sector budget had ensured at least 25% of beneficiaries to be women. As for the Health and Social Services Sector, women-specific allocation was SLRS 12.50 MN which was 50% of the total allocation. For agriculture and Irrigation sector around 40% was allocated for women-specific projects/activities. 65% out of the animal production budget was allocated mostly for economic empowerment of Women Headed Families.

**Stereotypes and gender-based violence against women**

*Criminalize marital rape and expand the definition of torture in the Torture Act to include in it severe forms of sexual violence*

55. Criminalizing marital rape and expanding the definition of Torture in the Torture Act has been referred to the Committee working on Criminal Law Reforms appointed by the Ministry of Justice in 2020.

*Amend the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act*

56. The Amendments made to the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act No. 34 of 2005 submitted to the Cabinet on the 11<sup>th</sup> December 2020 are as follows:

- Broadened the categories of public officials who may take legal action on behalf of the aggrieved person;
- Ensuring safety of not only the aggrieved person but also the dependents by issuing an interim order;
- Arrangement of safe housing to the aggrieved person, counseling to address the emotional and mental distress of the aggrieved person;
- Inclusion of "undue hardships the aggrieved person may suffer as a result of any domestic violence if protection order is not issued for the safety of the aggrieved person;
- Focusing not only on the aggrieved person but also their children and dependents in issuing an interim order;
- Securing any minor child from the custody of the respondent temporarily, taking into consideration the best interest of the child.

<sup>4</sup> National Elections Commission data.

57. The Cabinet Sub Committee appointed for scrutinizing the Amendments has cleared it and instructed the Legal Draftsman to go ahead with the procedures.

*Establish a special unit in the Attorney General's Department to expedite the handling of cases of sexual violence and to introduce legislation: to prohibit suspended sentences and stipulate mandatory minimum sentences for acts of violence against women*

58. With the intention of expeditious conclusion of advice files on sexual violence investigations related to children (persons below 18 years), a unit was established at the Attorney General's Department on 18th August 2004. In 2020 the Unit was under the direct supervision of the Additional Solicitor General ably assisted by a Senior Deputy Solicitor General. Having come into existence as an ad hoc unit, Cabinet approval had been sought to convert this to be a permanent unit to handle child abuse cases. Appointment of a taskforce to plan an island wide robust campaign against child sexual abuse was another purpose of this Permanent Unit.

59. There are 23 Attorneys, 14 Clerical Staff and 7 Office Assistants render their services to the best of their ability. The primary target of the "CH Unit" being "expeditious disposal of the advice files", during the last 5 years this Unit has been able to dispose the following number of advice files received from the police.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Concluded Files</i>
2015	2345
2016	3105
2017	2717
2018	3105
2019	8879
2020	5868
Number of files currently pending	1935

60. In view of the large number of advice files received by the Attorney General's Department to render legal advice on sexual violence against children and women, it has been recommended that the aforementioned Cabinet memorandum be given effect to and permission be granted for the establishment of a permanent unit to handle the sexual violence matters relating to children and women.

61. During the period commencing from 1st January, 2020 to 31st December 2020, the Attorney General has concluded actions in 26449 criminal cases and forwarded 14,083 indictments to the high court. These cases include cases of sexual violence against women and children. The special unit in the department which was established to deal with cases related to children has been expanded to include incidents related to SGBV.

*Effectively implement the National Plan of Action for addressing Sexual and Gender Based Violence*

62. A review of the implementation of the Multi Sectorial National Action Plan to Address SGBV 2016 -2020 is currently underway. The review findings show more than 60% of implementation of the plans by the sectoral Ministries.

63. The health sector has implemented 86.3% of the planned activities out of which 57.8% are completed and 28.9% are on-going, some nearing completion. The activities include i.) Capacity building of health sector staff, ii.) Developed and institutionalized Standard Operative Procedures (SOPs) to address GBV targeting preventive health (PH). Public Health Midwives during their home visits are expected to be vigilant and identify survivors and offer emotional support (LIVES) and refer for additional support services. During the year 2019

PHMs were able to identify 13,795 survivors of which 7726 accepted the offer for referral. The key interventions carried out by the health sector in addressing the needs of survivors is the establishment of GBV Care Centers: *Mithuru Piyasa /Natpu Nilayam*, within the state hospitals utilizing the human resources available within the health system. 43 new GBV Care Centers have been started during reporting period and made operational in 75 hospitals, providing dedicated services to survivors of GBV. Two temporary shelters are being piloted in Kaluthara and Nuwaraeliya districts with the support of Provincial /District health authorities.

64. As part of the NAP implementation, Ministry of Labour and Trade Union Relations have implemented 46.25% of the planned activities and taken a number of steps to ensure safe workplace for the employees, negotiate with employers to provide transport facilities and other infrastructure to ensure safe working environment etc. DoL has jointly worked with Employers Federation and ILO to develop guidelines to address workplace harassment and a number of private sector establishments have agreed to these guidelines. The policy intervention on domestic workers is supported by civil society organizations and ILO. A research on the issues of domestic workers is done to build evidence that is to be used in the policy making process. Vocational and Technical Education Sub Sector has implemented 42% of the planned activities under the NAP. In 2017 the Treasury has issued instructions to sectoral line Ministries to allocate funds for the implementation of the NAP.

65. The Government has strengthened institutional structures to intensify activities to curb GBV. The officers attached to Women and children units at the divisional level, health professionals and volunteers at the *MithuruPiyasa/NaptuNilayam*, women officers of the Police Women and Child Desks, lawyers attached to the Legal Aid Commission and civil society organizations provide legal support, counselling, psycho social support and medical screening to victims of GBV. Counselling is provided by the staff of Women and Child Unit, the counselling unit of *Mithuru Piyasa* and NGO crisis centers. The 241 Counselling officers attached to the Women and Children's units provide counseling services for female victims of violence within the Division.

66. The Women's Bureau of Sri Lanka which has strength at the grass root level conducts awareness programmes for the communities on legal literacy and rights of women and on combating SGBV. With this exposure, women are not hesitating to report the cases to the police or to seek help from referral services that are now widely available. The increased number of cases made to the Police is a result of the exposure made through the awareness programmes conducted at the grass root level.

67. UN agencies have supported the implementation of the NAP to address SGBV. UNDP supported the formulation of the Policy and NAP to address SGBV and facilitated the dissemination of the NAP to relevant Ministries and agencies. UNFPA supported the NAP implementation and setting up a multi-sectoral web based electronic system to monitor the NAP. Further, UNDP has technically facilitated the establishment of a sub national level referral system in relation to SGBV. UNFPA has conducted a service provider mapping exercise in two districts to identify the gaps in service provision and had made recommendations. UNFPA and UNDP have supported capacity building programmes with multi-sectoral service providers and with district and divisional level Child and Women Development Units of MWCA.

*Intensify public awareness efforts, through strategic media campaigns and educational programmes to address discriminatory stereotypes against women and gender-based violence*

68. School textbooks were reviewed by the National Committee on Women to ascertain how gender was portrayed in the school text books. The findings were shared with the Ministry of Education and with the Minister in charge of the subject. School book writers were exposed to the subject of gender and gender integration in textbooks through a workshop to educate them to reflect on the concepts in developing the material. The Department of Education Publication has reported that the lessons in the textbooks include male and female characters in a balanced manner in almost all the subjects, pictures used in lessons include both genders and subjects

such as Civic Education and Health and Physical Education comprise topics related to women's rights and fulfilling household chores by both parents.

69. Realizing the gender gap in the national Media Policy the MWCA has developed a gender specific concern to be incorporated in the national media policy in consultation with media experts. Among other areas it included non-discrimination in the portrayal of women and girls in media, creating gender sensitivity in media reporting and non-trivializing in reporting violence incidences in media. These concerns were shared with the Ministry of Media and was tabled at the Parliamentary Gender Sectoral Committee for further action.

70. With the support of UNDP, the MWCA has launched a trilingual media campaign to engage men and boys to advance gender equality in Sri Lanka. The campaign consisted of a series of videos and talk shows which have been aired on national media. The campaign has focused on addressing unequal power relations between men and women and transforming traditional norms to ensure that all people are equal and free from discrimination.

*Ensure systematic collection and analysis of data on all forms of gender-based violence against women*

71. In 2017, the MWCA has initiated a pilot project to develop a unified system to collect data along with the organizations working to address SGBV. The organizations have their own data collection systems developed according to their objectives and activities they perform. It was revealed that developing a unified system was not feasible due to differences in objectives in collecting the data.

72. The Police have their own method of collecting data-centered in the Bureau for the Prevention of Abuse of Children and Women which is connected with all the Police stations in the island. The Bureau maintains a database of the cases reported to each police station across the country. The Sri Lanka Police is most often the first point of contact in Sri Lanka for women seeking redress from acts of violence, including sexual abuse. Each of 492 police stations has a Children & Women Desk headed by a female police officer and responsible for dealing with issues related to women and children, including prevention, awareness among schools and Government institutions.

73. The services of the Toll-free Helpline of the National Committee on Women which has island-wide coverage is available 24 hours of the day. The number of complaints received by the hotline is collected and analyzed quarterly. An increase of cases was observed from 398 in 2014 to 10,675 in 2020.<sup>5</sup>

74. The Gender and Women's Health Unit of the Family Health Bureau of the Ministry of Health (MoH) also maintains data collected from Care Centres (MithuruPiyasa) which are located in hospitals. The mental Health section of the MoH maintains its own data on SGBV cases. A range of NGOs working with survivors has their own databases. Even though the data is dispersed among the institutions, data is collected on the survivors of SGBV and intervention strategies are often planned accordingly. Recently, in 2019 a national survey on SGBV was conducted by Department of Census and Statistics in collaboration with UNFPA. It can be considered the most recent baseline on status of SGBV in Sri Lanka.

**Conflict related sexual and gender-based violence against women**

*Implement the zero-tolerance policy for sexual violence perpetrated by the army and the police*

75. Sri Lanka endorsed the International Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflicts on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2016. Noting the concerns raised regarding alleged sexual violence perpetrated by the security forces, clear instructions have been issued to all branches

<sup>5</sup> National Committee on Women.



of the security forces as well as the police that strict action will be taken against all personnel who engage in human rights violations including torture, rape, sexual and gender based violence. In line with the government's zero tolerance of sexual and gender-based violence, National Plan of Action to address Sexual and Gender-based Violence has been adopted and is being implemented. Also action has been taken to bring perpetrators of reported incidents of sexual violence by individual members of the security forces to justice.

*Reinforce national investigative and prosecutorial capacities as well as witness and victims' protection and support*

76. The Assistance to and Protection of Victims of Crime and Witness Act no. 4 of 2015 was enacted with the objectives of:

- providing for the setting out of rights and entitlements of victims of crime and witnesses and the protection and promotion of such rights and entitlements; and
- giving effect to appropriate international norms, standards and best practices relating to the protection of victims of crime and witnesses.

77. In order to give effect to the provisions of the Act, the National Authority for the Protection of Victims and Witnesses was established consequently and the Act was later amended by the Assistance to and Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses (Amendment) Act. no. 27 of 2017 to facilitate recording of evidence from remote locations.

78. As a measure of addressing the delays of justice, the 20<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka provided for an increase of the number of judges of the Superior Courts. Accordingly, the cadre of judicial officers to the Superior Courts was increased, by appointing 6 new judges to the Supreme Court and 14 new judges to the Court of Appeal on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2020.

79. Please refer the Section 15 on Access to Justice and Section 17 on Women, peace and security – Transitional justice mechanisms.

*Carry out a comprehensive mapping of all pending criminal investigations*

80. The GoSL is committed to ensuring that a fair trial is conducted with respect all cases of sexual violence. The government is in the process of taking action to expedite the speedy completion of large number of cases of sexual violence pending before the courts.

**Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution**

*Ensure sufficient human, technical and financial resources for the effective implementation and monitoring of the National Strategic Plan to Monitor and Combat Human Trafficking (2016)*

81. The Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force led by the Ministry of Justice upon the receipt of the appropriate approval from the Cabinet of Ministers, initiated the National Action Plan 2015-2019 to Combat Human Trafficking. As the specified time period lapsed at the end of the year 2019, the stakeholder institutions implemented the action specified in the previous Action Plan in year 2020. The National Action Plan covering the period from 2021-2025 has already been approved by the Cabinet. The previous Action Plan was implemented successfully by the member agencies and despite the challenges managed to achieve the targets specified below:

- (a) Establishing a National Authority for the protection of victims of Crimes and Witnesses;
- (b) Establishing a Victims of Crime and Witness Assistance and Protection Police Division;

- (c) Conducted awareness programmes for public servants on the Witness Protection Act;
- (d) Creation of a fund to provide compensation for victims of violence.

*Provide continuous capacity-building for law enforcement and other concerned public officials on the early identification, referral, rehabilitation and social integration of trafficking victims*

82. Continuous training programmes are being conducted by Sri Lanka Police to enhance the investigative capacity of the officers of Sri Lanka Police with a specific focus on the officials attached to the special investigation division dedicated to Human Trafficking in the CID. In addition, the Attorney General's Department too conducts capacity building programmes to enhance the skills of the prosecutors specifically in the area of human trafficking. During the year 2020 Sri Lanka prosecutors secured two convictions under section 360 (c) which can be highlighted as a significant progress after certain years of time.

*Prevent, prosecute and adequately punish traffickers and adopt gender-specific protection measures for women and girl victims*

83. Almost all the presumed victims of trafficking are provided with shelter facilities, medical care, counselling services and security by the concerned Authorities upon the necessity. Not only for the local presumed victims of trafficking but foreigners who had become presumed victims of trafficking had been provided with the same facilities and had provided repatriation assistance once the legal proceedings are concluded.

84. In respect of gender-specific protection, a specific shelter had been established by the SMWCDPSE to provide presumed female victims of trafficking with adequate shelter facilities upon the direction of the court for a period specified..

*Address the legal gaps that impede the prosecution of traffickers under article 360(c) of the Penal Code*

85. Rather than classifying the impediments as 'legal gaps' as there are no legal gaps in the existing legislation in prosecuting the perpetrators, it is observed that there are practical difficulties in leading evidence to proceed in the matters initiated under Section 360 (c). They can be specified as the reluctance of the victims to proceed in matter, stigma or due to the fear of the secondary victimization reluctance to testify in Courts, unwillingness to proceed in the legal matter with the fear of losing wages by daily paid employees can be viewed as impediments in proceeding with the prosecution. Such gaps are being addressed.

*Systematically collect sex-disaggregated data on both exploitation of prostitution and trafficking in persons*

86. Statistics pertaining to the number of victims of trafficking, specific to certain periods are available with the Ministry of Justice.

*Intensify efforts aimed at bilateral, regional and international cooperation to prevent trafficking*

87. With regard to regional cooperation in the regional investigations, any request from Sri Lanka can be sent in terms of the provisions of the Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Act No. 25 of 2002.

*Repeal the Vagrants Ordinance Act*

88. Section 3 (2) of the Act provides that "A police officer may arrest, without a warrant every person deemed to be an idle or disorderly person." There are allegations that police is using the law to arbitrarily arrest women for prostitution and to subject these women to

harassment. The Department of Social Services has confirmed that two rounds of discussions to amend the Act have been held under their leadership. The last discussion initiated by the Ministry of Justice was held with the participation of the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, Department of Probation and Child Care Services, Department of Prisons, The Police and the Attorney General's Department. It was agreed during these discussions to amend all matters affecting violence against women and girls by amending the relevant Act.

### **Participation in political and public life and in decision-making**

*Ensure, within a set timeframe, the enactment of the proposed minimum 30% quota for women candidates on nomination papers of political parties*

89. A request was made by the MWCA to the Ministry of Provincial Council to provide for 30% quota for women by amending the Provincial Council Election Act No.17. The MWCA submitted a memorandum to the Parliament Sectoral Committee on Gender urging to amend the Parliament Election Act to provide 25% of the party nominations to women and half of the appointments on the national list to be reserved for women. It provided an opportunity to raise awareness among the Parliamentarians on the need for a quota for women in the Parliament.

*Adopt measures, including temporary special measures, in accordance with article 4 (1) of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 25 (2004) on temporary special measures, in the form of legal quota for women, including minority women*

90. Out of the 2,200 women elected to local government bodies, 280 comprised of Tamil members.<sup>6</sup> Out of 13 female members served in the last Parliament (2015-2020) two were Tamils. Female minority representation in Parliament is yet to be increased.

*Undertake awareness-raising activities targeting the general public and political parties on the importance of the participation of women in decision-making*

91. Throughout the reporting period the MWCA and the civil society organizations were conducting training programs for women aspiring to enter politics. After declaring the local government elections, the government and NGOs accelerated the training which resulted in the availability of an adequate number of trained women in the country who could be given nominations at the election. For capacity building of the members of the Parliament and the Local Government, the National Committee on Women (NCW) has delivered programs. The main focus of the National Committee on Women (NCW) has been to encourage women's participation in politics. NCW has conducted a number of awareness programmes for women representatives at District as well as at national level promoting and inspiring their interest in politics. In order to support this endeavour, NCW has developed training manuals and other material mainly in printed form that had been used in the awareness sessions.

92. One of the major programs is the diploma level study program on Political Science conducted by the University of Peradeniya. The SMWCDPSE in collaboration with the University of Peradeniya continues to conduct a Certificate Course for women leaders and one hundred and eighty women were trained including women of minority groups. Also, the Federation of Local Government Authorities of Sri Lanka conducts training programs to the members of the Local Authorities continuously. The Government has made several measures to realize the commitment made to achieve Goal 5.5 of SDGs ensuring women's full participation in political bodies.

93. In 2021, the Parliament Women Caucus has proposed to the Parliament Select Committee on Electoral Reforms to identify appropriate reforms of the election laws and the electoral system and to recommend necessary amendments that 50% of the national list should

<sup>6</sup> National Committee on Women.

be for women and that the representation of women in Parliament, Provincial Councils and Local Government authorities should be increased to 30%.

*Establish a disaggregated data collection system on the participation of women representing different minorities in decision-making positions in all sectors and at all levels*

94. The MWCA has developed a database to collect information on the women members serving in the Parliament and Local Government bodies and included the capacity-building initiatives conducted with them.

### **Education**

95. Due to consistent policies upholding free education and compulsory enrolment in school, women achieve a high level of education. There continues to be a policy of no-discrimination.

*Use temporary special measures aimed at eliminating disparities*

96. Under the district quota system introduced in 1973 and 40% are admitted to universities in island-wide merit, 55% on district quota and 5% on the least developed districts.<sup>7</sup> The system is implemented in cognizance of the disparities that may exist in the regional education system. The government continues to make allocations and implement programs to upgrade rural schools, deploy more teachers and assist rural children through the provision of free schoolbooks and uniforms.

*Ensure the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of human rights and peace education in the curricula at all levels of education*

97. The existing curricula for school children offer them an understanding of the cultural and religious values of different communities. The curricular also promotes the importance of ethnic and religious peace and harmony. In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) has included segments on peace and reconciliation in the school curricula in 2017.

*Combat discriminatory gender stereotypes in education and mainstream gender into national education policies*

98. Policies are being formulated to mainstream gender in the general education sector and gender sensitivity is scanned through the school text books. A special committee is appointed at the Ministry of Education to scan all syllabi, school text books and teacher guides for their gender sensitivity. (Please refer to the section on stereotypes). Effective implementation of the gender sensitive policies of the education sector is mandated to the four State Ministries under the Cabinet Ministry of education. A period poverty programme is implemented by SMWCDPSE and 34 schools were initially given sanitary towels to be distributed among the female students. This programme will be extended to all schools in 2021. Special nutrition programmes and health screenings are conducted in all schools in collaboration between MoH and SMWCDPSE.

*Develop and expand gender-sensitive programmes including temporary special measures in high technological skills*

99. The national skill development strategies implemented during the reporting period included the formulation of the TVET policy in which gender is a cross-cutting theme, establishment of the National Competency Standards and Curricula in 2018, developing standards for 27 industries or occupation groups, that includes food processing industry,

---

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Higher Education.

domestic occupations, nursing and paramedics, textile and garment, footwear and leather products that are usually female dominant areas.

100. The total number completed apprenticeship training in NAITA was 15,284 in 2018. The Female participation in apprenticeship was 31.4%.<sup>8</sup> NAITA has given On the Job and In-plant training in 2018 to a total of 17,743 students comprising 47.7% of females. Out of the total number of 14,926 completions, 50.4% of females have completed the training.<sup>9</sup> Out of the 61,150 recipients of NVQ certificates in 2018, 39.1% were females.

101. AusAid Skills for Inclusive Growth (ASIG) program supports women to access vocational education and training aligned to skills gaps in the tourism sector.

102. Currently the Skill Development Sector is developing a 10 year National Action Plan for Skill Development. Further, the National Policy Framework of Vistas of Prosperity & Splendour has given priority to skill development through its policy component "Towards a skilled society" and it includes the strategy "A trained, energetic workforce to achieve accelerated development to reduce the unskilled category in the labour force". As for increasing female entry to the labour force the same national policy and plan have included the following activities:

- Regulate and standardize and expand child care facilities for increasing women participation in the labour force;
- Introduce flexible working arrangement for young mothers;
- Develop a Youth Human Resource data bank;
- Eradicate the culture of ragging from educational institutions;
- Promote home based export-oriented industries.

103. There are no gender barriers to enter courses and women are encouraged to apply for courses by providing adequate facilities in training environment.

*Institutionalize age-appropriate comprehensive education on sexual and reproductive health and rights*

104. Age-appropriate sexuality education is delivered in schools from grade 6 onwards and comprehensive sexual education for grade 13 students. Module on adolescent reproductive health for vocational trainees is introduced. Sexual and reproductive health information is included in school health websites in Sinhala, Tamil and English languages.

## **Employment**

*Adopt measures to facilitate women's entry into traditionally male dominated fields of employment*

105. Expansion of education in STEM subjects, introducing the Technology stream in Grade 13 and encouraging girls to follow non-traditional vocations in technical education have provided opportunities for girls to equip with necessary skills needed to enter non-traditional fields of employment.

*Implement laws and policies to protect and promote the rights of women working in informal sectors as well as free trade zones*

106. The general labour law applies to the employers and employees in the factories and other establishments in free trade zones. Regular labour inspections are carried out in Free trade zones and employees are mainly safeguarded by the Factories Ordinance No. 45 of 1942, Employment

<sup>8</sup> National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

of Women Young Persons and Children's Act No. 47 of 1956, Maternity Benefits Ordinance No. 32 of 1939, Wages Board Ordinance No. 27 of 1941, etc.

107. Addressing SGBV in workplaces has been taken up at multiple forums, with the participation of the Department of Labour. Guidelines were developed jointly with EFC and ILO in 2013 on addressing SGBV in workplaces, which is currently being promoted to be implemented in establishments with EFC membership. Plans are in place to ratify the ILO C190.

108. As for development of a hotline for workers in the free trade zones, 1938 which is NCW hotline is already available, therefore Department of Labour considers that it would be appropriate to promote the same to FTZ. Women & Child Affairs Division and Social Dialogue Division of the DoL are conducting awareness programmes on gender related issues.

109. A review on Domestic Workers has been conducted, for which the Department of Labour has contributed through facilitation of dialogue and forums. Ministry of Labour is in further consultation with relevant stakeholders to amend the respective labour laws regarding domestic workers.

*Reduce the gender wage gap by applying regular pay surveys and establishing effective monitoring and regulatory mechanisms for employment and recruitment practices*

110. Labour law of Sri Lanka has discarded the practice of gender-based wage discrimination. However, in the Sri Lanka labour force survey, the wage gap is calculated using the data captured through the surveys. Accordingly, the wage gaps for the years 2017, 2018, and 2019 are given below.

Wage gap in the informal sector

<i>Year</i>	<i>Wage gap in the Informal sector</i>
2017	50.30%
2018	48.20%
2019	49.22%

*Source: Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey 2017, 2018, 2019*

111. The wages board ordinance No. 27 of 1941 has been amended by No. 14 of 2019 amendment and it is in force from 24th September 2019. However, this amendment has not addressed the wage gaps as indicated in the table above in regard to the informal sector.

*Collect disaggregated data on sexual harassment in both the public and private sectors, including on the sanctions imposed on perpetrators*

112. A circular No;01/2017 dated 27/01/2017 has been issued by the SMWCDPSE.

113. As per the Cabinet Decision no. 16/25/22/740/013 on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2016 sexual harassment committees were established 10 line Ministries in 2018 with the view of preventing all kinds of harassment in the work place. Awareness programmes are conducted by MWCA encouraging women to make complaints about sexual harassments that have taken place. The Ministry is in the process of preparing a guideline to make the ministries aware on the implementation of anti-harassment committees while ensuring to maintain a decent workplace for all especially for women. Private companies including factories in free trade zones have also established sexual harassment committees. A code of conduct was introduced in 2013 to prevent and address the sexual harassment in the private sector by the Employers' Federation of Ceylon.

*Provide assistance to former female combatants to access appropriate employment and vocational training opportunities free from stereotypes*

114. In the National Action Plan for Female Headed Households of the MWCA, ex-combatants are recognized as a separate group with special vulnerabilities in need of support. The Government has absorbed 669 ex combatants to the Civil Defence Force and out of them 129 are women. In 2017 ONUR has provided livelihood assistance for 750 families of ex-combatants in Kilinochchi and Mullativu districts.<sup>10</sup>

*Ratifying ILO convention number 189 concerning decent work for domestic workers*

115. Ministry of Labour is in further consultation with relevant stakeholders to amend the respective labour laws regarding domestic workers.

## **Health**

*Amend its legislation to legalize abortion not only in cases in which the life of the pregnant woman is threatened, but also in all cases of rape, incest and severe foetal impairment*

116. The attempt was made by the Ministry of Justice to bring changes to the existing legal provisions in the Penal Code to permit the medical termination of pregnancies in the specific circumstances of rape and incest, where pregnancy occurs below the age of 16 (a victim of statutory rape), and in cases of serious foetal impairment. The policy submitted by the Cabinet was subjected to the observation to proceed with the consultation with all religious leaders. The amendment was referred to religious leaders for their observations.

*Remove barriers to women's access to safe abortion services*

117. The current law on abortion continues to include the termination of pregnancy to save a life of a woman in a life threatening medical indication. Attempts are being made expand the exception to include rape and congenital anomalies of the foetus.

*Ensure adequate budgetary allocations to meet the health needs of women in conflict-affected areas and in the plantations sector, especially for sexual and reproductive health*

118. At present, all the health services including curative and preventive services are equally distributed in each and every district of the country. Country is divided into 353 field health divisions named as Medical Officer of Health areas. Public Health Midwife (PHMs) as the grassroots level health care provider at field level, caters to 3000-5000 population with regard to women's reproductive health needs. PHMs provide a comprehensive package of maternal and child healthcare inclusive of Pre Conception Care, Antenatal care, Pregnancy care, Post-partum care, Well women clinic service, Family Planning, prevention of SGBV and supporting survivors of SGBV. Domiciliary care is provided by the PHMs all over the country.

*Ensure access to sexuality information for all women and girls*

119. Family Health Bureau of Ministry of Health in collaboration with Health Promotion Bureau of the Ministry of Health develops and disseminates sexual health information applicable to women and girls. These information is accessible for girls and women in the country. It is delivered through different methods as appropriate to the target population. Ex: posters, leaflets, social media campaigns, media workshops, websites, group discussions, workshops, seminars. Women targeted sexual health information is disseminated approaching the life cycle through the Field health staff of Medical Officer of Health areas. Sexual health education is mainstreamed in most of the services including preconception, pregnancy, post-partum, women at age 35 and 45 and at well women clinics.

<sup>10</sup> Information of Office for National Unity and Reconciliation.

120. A “National Strategic Plan 2019-2023 Well –Woman Programme” developed by the Family Health Bureau with support from UNFPA Sri Lanka is in place and in line with the National Strategic Framework for Development of Health Services 2016-2025.

*Provide region- specific data on the transmission and prevalence of the HIV infection*

121. Please refer page 28,29 of the common Core Document.

### **Women Heads of Households**

*Establish a disaggregated database on women heads of households in the State party which takes account of the heterogeneity within the group and use this to develop a clear and inclusive categorization of women heads of households to be used uniformly in welfare and resettlement policies and programmes*

122. The SMWCDPSE is using the data on WHHs collected by the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS). The Ministry is currently collecting data and information on the WHHs in terms of age, marital status, and income level, number of children, disability and health status to facilitate implementation of the Action Plan on WHHs. The categorization of WHHs by the DCS includes, never married, married, divorced, separated and widowed. It has recognized the diversity within WHHs and the Government is using the data as collected by DCS in planning and policy -making.

*Amend the bribery Act to include the offence of sexual bribery to ensuring that perpetrators are adequately punished*

123. Despite the Bribery Act is not amended to incorporate Sexual Bribery, several actions were taken to empower women against it. The Bribery Commission has included sexual forms of gratification instead of gratification alone in the National Action Plan for Combatting Bribery and Corruption. A project titled ‘Hidden Challenges’ is being implemented with the support of SMWCDPSE to empower women against sexual bribery. Requests have been made to include sexual bribery in the training modules of the organizations providing training to Government and private sector organizations. Although sexual bribery is not included in the Bribery Act, action could be taken to file a Fundamental Rights petition under Article 11 of the Constitution or file a complaint with the Bribery Commission or the Public Service Commission.

*Create a social security system for women headed households*

124. There are numerous social security systems in place to cover women in the informal sector. WHHs, depending on the level of their income could enroll under these systems which come under the purview of the Ministry of Social Services. The Samurdhi programme has also social insurance system covering the vulnerable groups that include WHHs.

*Ensure equal eligibility criteria for women and men to obtain bank loans, mortgages and other forms of financial credit*

125. Both men and women have the same eligibility criteria to obtain bank loans, mortgages and other forms of financial credits. Exploitation of women by private financial companies as a result of women’s limited access to credit is taken on board for discussion by the Government in 2020 and policy reforms are under discussion.

*Introduce low interest or interest-free credit schemes for women heads of households and families living in poverty*

126. The Ministry of Samurdhi Development and the Women’s Bureau of Sri Lanka are the main Government institutions which address the credit needs of WHHs. During the period 2016-2020 a total of Rs. 8.51 million was disbursed as micro loans among women under



Samurdhi Enterprise Programme of the Samurdhi Department.<sup>11</sup> Of the total number of beneficiaries 67% comprised of women. Women engaged in micro enterprises under the categories of agriculture development, livestock development, fisheries development, small industries development are provided with Rs. 50,000 livelihood assistance and technical know-how to develop their enterprises. The Samurdhi banks and Samurdhi Banking societies provide 21 types of loan schemes with different annual interest rates ranging from 4% -12% Repayment period also differs from 1 to 6 years according to the type of loan obtained.

127. During the period 2016-2019 the Women's Bureau of Sri Lanka has disbursed Rs.29.4m among 2,466 WHHs to engage in livelihood development activities. This is an interest free loan recoverable within a one year period.<sup>12</sup>

128. The Women's Bureau of Sri Lanka has provided a total of SLRS.201Mn for economic empowerment of WHHs during the reporting period. 1214 women benefitted from this allocation. In addition, SLRS. 30. 9Mn was allocated for WHHs as grants and SLRS. 7.75Mn. as loans.

*Established a well – coordinated and organized system for issuing personal documents and property titles to ensure women's equal access to livelihood assistance, housing and land in their own name*

129. Property rights are determined mainly by the Roman Dutch law which stands as the common law of the country that acknowledges equal rights to women. However, land is owned by or given to men as Head of Household which is a customary practice. Please refer section 13 (a) for more information.

130. The MWCA and the civil society organizations had several discussions with the Ministry of Lands requesting to introduce joint ownership to land citing that there are no legal prohibitions to grant state land in joint ownership and in land alienation. However, this matter is yet to be revised but the lobbying is being continued.

### **Migrant women**

*The Committee recommends that the State party abolish the Family Background Report (MFE/RAD/10/13), with a view to lifting the sex-specific restrictions on migration*

131. Considering the protection and wellbeing of children of female migrant workers, the FBR regulation was introduced in 2013, and it was under scrutiny by many researchers and women's rights activists. On 22.04.2016 the Ministry of Foreign Employment (MoFE) submitted a Cabinet Paper seeking the removal of the FBR and easing out on the barriers that prevent female migrant workers from getting into foreign employment. However, the Cabinet responded to this paper by appointing a Ministerial Committee in June 2016, to look into the concerns highlighted in the MoFE Cabinet Paper and make recommendations. Committee submitted their report with recommendations to the Cabinet on 22.09.2016. The Cabinet responded to the recommendations and a six month pilot project was implemented incorporating the recommendations. Following the recommendations, an FBR committee was to be established at the Divisional Secretariat Level with Divisional Secretary /Assistant Divisional Secretary as the Chair of the committee. Meanwhile an ILO commissioned qualitative and multi-site research to examine the impact of FBR regulation on different stakeholders engaged in the labour migration process was conducted by Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA).

132. Subsequent to the pilot project and CEPA research, MoFE submitted another Cabinet Paper on 16.07.2018 seeking the removal of FBR. Again a Cabinet Sub-Committee was appointed to make recommendations to the Cabinet and on 09.01.2019 the committee report was submitted to the Cabinet. However, the Cabinet rejected the proposal to remove the FBR

<sup>11</sup> Data provided by the Samurdhi Authority.

<sup>12</sup> Women's Bureau of Sri Lanka.

on 13.02.2019 highlighting the probable consequences on the young children and directed to simplify the process. At present the system is made to separate the prospective female migrant workers as women with children and without children. The chair of the Divisional FBR committee can give the recommendation directly, exempting the FBR compliance system for the women without children to expedite the departure process. Women with children have to submit the FBR with a care plan which will be examined by the FBR committee at the divisional secretariat level. There is also an appeal system in operation, so that women get a hearing to their pleas.

### **Rural Women**

*Establish a mechanism to ensure the implementation, monitoring and assessment of rural economic development investments benefitting women*

133. The SMWCDPSE currently monitors the special allocation for women under the budget line of rural economic development investments. The monitoring is carried out through the WDOs attached to the Divisional Secretariats. Data is collected from divisional sources and the progress is reviewed periodically. The SMWCDPSE has developed a system to improve the quality of services of field level officers through enhanced Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) system making them accountable for the functions carried out. This was included in the job description of the officers of the State Ministry working at the field level.

*Use temporary special measures to ensure women's participation in the leadership of trade unions of rural industries*

134. Activities of Trade Unions are governed by the Trade Union Ordinance No.14 of 1935 and these include membership, office bearers, executives and committees. Trade Unions are formed voluntarily as per the requirement of the employees working independently as independent legal entities. The Government as the labour regulator is not in a position to influence the trade unions to increase female participation unless women themselves advocate for reforms. Trade Unions are in operation in the estate sector and in the free trade zones and women employees of these sectors have obtained membership.

*Address the poor working conditions in the fisheries industry and provide health and counseling support to women with drug addictions*

135. The Ministry of Fisheries, with the help of their institutions such as the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, National Aquaculture Development Authority of Sri Lanka and National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency address the poor working conditions in the fisheries industry. Moreover, awareness programmes and training programs for rural fisherwomen are annually conducted by the Department of Fisheries and the National Aquaculture Development Authority. Necessary advice and technical support are provided by field officers such as fisheries inspectors and extension officers who are aware of the working conditions of fisherwomen.

*Address the pay gap and the denial of maternity leave in rural industries*

136. This issue is not addressed yet. However discussions are ongoing for providing protection measures for women in the informal sector. The Maternity Benefits Ordinance No. 32 of 1939 makes provisions prohibiting any employer knowingly employing a woman worker at any time during the period of four weeks immediately following her confinement.

### **Militarization of land**

137. A process is already in place, led by the Ministry of Defence, in order to expedite releasing of remaining private lands occupied by the security forces, in accordance with a proper

land release process, without compromising the vital national security concerns of the country. Of the lands previously held by the security forces, i.e. 89.26% of State lands have been released and 92.22% of private lands, have already been released to the civilian owners by 31 December 2019.

138. It is also noted that 98.7% of land in the North and East which had been contaminated due to landmines and Unexploded Explosive Ordnances (UXOs) placed by the LTTE without records in civilian areas, have already been demined, thereby facilitating the process of land return and resettlement. As at present, majority of the private lands occupied by the military at the end of the conflict in year 2009 had been released to legitimate land owned civilians by the military forces through local government authorities.

139. The releasing of the remaining land would be considered, having regard to the strategic requirements of the security forces establishments in the North and the East subject further to the procedures established by law with regard to the vesting of land and the divesting of land in terms of the procedures established by law.

### **Discriminatory laws in Marriage and Family Relations**

140. A Cabinet Memorandum has been submitted on 11th November 2020 to change the minimum age for marriage as 18 years for both male and females. The reforms have also included recruiting women Quazis to Board of Qazi members, as marriage registrars and adjudicators. At the Cabinet meeting held on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021 instructions were given to the Minister of Justice to instruct the Legal Draftsman to draft legislation on (a) age limit of Muslim marriages (b) introduce laws to abolish Quazi courts and prohibit polygamous marriages of Muslim men.

*Prepare a unified family code in conformity with the Convention*

141. The Civil Law Reforms Committee will consider reforms required for family law.

*Amend the General Marriage Registration Ordinance to ensure that Muslim Women have the free choice to opt out from the Muslim Personal law so as to be registered under the general law*

142. The committee appointed to look into amendments to the provisions of the MMDA will take into consideration the freedom of individuals to choose between the general law and the personal law.

*Ensure that property rights are governed by civil contractual and property law rather than religious law*

143. The Civil law reforms Committee is looking into the reform.

*Increase the minimum age of marriage for all women in the State party to 18 years of age*

144. Please refer the section on Discriminatory Laws.

*Eliminate any restrictions on women's eligibility to be appointed as Qazi, Marriage registrars and adjudicators*

145. Laws will be formulated to abolish Quazi courts.

*Amend article 363 of the Penal Code to ensure that crime of statutory rape applies to all girls under the age of 16 without exception*

146. Once the amendment to Muslim Marriages and Divorce Act is approved a consequential amendment will be brought into amend the Penal Code.

## **Progress of the CEDAW specific articles**

### **CEDAW articles 2 – 4: Elimination of discrimination, right to fully participate in all fields and temporary special measures**

147. Article 12(1) and 12 (2) of the Fundamental Rights Chapter in the Constitution guarantee the right to equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex. The Women’s Charter is still continuing to be the policy on women’s rights which was prepared based on women’s rights and nondiscrimination enshrined in CEDAW substantively and inclusively. The Women’s Charter outlines seven areas through a rights- based approach endorsing the responsibility of the state to take necessary measures in realizing equality for women.

148. Since the policy on women was adopted in 1993 and in view of the changes occurred in the field of gender during the period, and action has been taken to develop a new policy on women to suit the current context in 2019. It adopts Principles that uphold women’s rights enshrined in CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action and Sustainable Development Goals.

149. In pursuance to the efforts made by the women’s groups and the government agencies it has been possible to receive a quota for women in the local government bodies by amending the Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Act, No. 1 of 2016.

150. The Right to Information Act No 12 was enacted in 2016 to provide right of access to information. This is expected to increase citizens’ participation of public life and promotion of accountability and good governance amongst the public authorities.

### **Article 5: Elimination of prejudices and customary and other practices**

151. Article 12 (2) of the Constitution stipulates that ‘no citizen shall be discriminated against on the grounds of race, religion language caste, sex political opinion place of birth or any such grounds” It is clear that the grounds of non-discrimination set out in this Article are not exhaustive and could cover differences pertaining to sexual orientation as well. The Subcommittee on Fundamental Rights appointed by the Constitutional Assembly in 2017 addresses sexual orientation as a ground of non-discrimination. The Sub Committee Report states that no person shall be arbitrarily discriminated against on any ground including race, gender, sex, sexual orientation gender identity”.

152. The SDG 5.3.2 focusses on the elimination of all harmful practices including female genital mutilation. The issue which was hidden has emerged recently in the public and women’s groups are having public discussions on its consequences. Muslim women’s groups have approached state authorities and are lobbying with the Government to take necessary action to mitigate the situation and to be recognized as a crime. It has become a public health issue as well as a child abuse issue. The Section 308(A) (1) of the Penal Code states that any person who causes willful assault, ill- treatment, neglect or injury to the health of a person under the age of eighteen commits the offence of cruelty to children punishable with imprisonment not exceeding ten years and compensation to the victim.

153. In elimination of discrimination, the National Committee on Women successfully advocated for the removal of Column 6 of the Birth Certificate which is on marital status of the parents and was referred to the Parliamentary Sectorial Committee on Gender. This removal was made based on the difficulties faced by the mother who becomes pregnant as a result of rape, agony faced by the mother in school admissions and in employment and the stigma faced by both the mother and the child.

## **Article 6: Trafficking and exploitation of women**

154. Trafficking is often linked with commercial sexual exploitation and labor migration. The Government is concerned about eliminating trafficking and has taken efforts to convict traffickers, identifying more trafficking victims and continuing with training and awareness - raising for Government officials, and civil society organizations. Trafficking cases are dealt under Penal Code provision 360 (C) and in line with the Convention on Preventing and combatting Trafficking in Women and Children. The SOPs are implemented to create a victim centered approach in referral, provision of assistance, protection of victims of human trafficking.

155. National Anti-Human Trafficking Task force was established under the leadership of Ministry of Justice with representatives from 17 Government institutions. Monthly meetings of the task force is conducted for sharing information among the members and disseminate best practices. The Task Force has developed a five-year Action Plan to monitor and combat human trafficking which was approved by the Cabinet. In 2020 the Judiciary issued a directive to all High Courts to expedite disposal of human trafficking cases.

156. The Police continued to conduct anti - trafficking training for new recruits. The Trafficking Task force members facilitate capacity development programs for their officers and the public. Media campaigns are also conducted to send the message across to the public by the SMWCDPSE which runs a shelter for women victims of trafficking. Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) conducts awareness programs for prospective migrant workers within Sri Lanka and in service migrant workers at some diplomatic missions.

157. SLBFE is making efforts to curb unauthorized migration practices in which women have become victims. SLBFE has established a new unit to deal with complaints of migrant workers. After scrutinizing the facts of such complaints, the cases are then referred to the CID. The SLBFE operates 15 short term shelters at Sri Lankan diplomatic Missions in 14 countries for female migrant workers in distress. The shelters have served 11,215 migrant workers from April to November 2019 which is an increase from 1806 in 2018.

## **Article 7: Participation in political and public life and in decision making**

158. Women continue to enjoy rights equal with men, both in political and public life. Accordingly, the number of women political representatives, women's participation in the formulation of government policy, holding public office and performing public functions at all levels of the Government has increased.

159. Article 12 (2) of the Constitution guarantees equal rights for women to be elected to political bodies. The National Human Rights Action Plan (2017-21) includes obtaining a quota for women in political bodies, enhancing skills of potential women candidates, and development of guidelines for nominations and electing women to parliament, provincial councils and local authorities. With strong lobbying of MWCA and civil society groups, the Local Authority's Elections (Amendment) Act no. 16 of 2017 incorporated a 25% quota for women in Local Government Authorities. As a result representation of women in the local government bodies increased from 2% to 22% at the elections held in 2017. It was an increase from less than 100 to 2200 seats. Altogether 14,826 female candidates contested at the elections.<sup>13</sup>

160. As indicated in the National Human Rights Action Plan MWCA developed a set of criteria for selection of women candidates for the local government elections and forwarded to the political parties to consider in the selection of female candidates.

161. During the reporting period three elections have been held: Parliament election (2020), Presidential elections (2019) and Local government election (2018). Women's political

<sup>13</sup> National Elections Commission.

consciousness is reflected in the interest shown in voting which is estimated to be more than 50% almost in all the elections according to the records of the Election Commission. One important feature in the Presidential Elections was that a female candidate contested at the Presidential election after 20 years and secured the 7<sup>th</sup> place out of 35 contestants. At the Parliamentary elections held in August 2020, 59 female candidates contested, 8 got elected and 4 female candidates were selected on the national list. Female representation in the current Parliament is 5.3%.

162. In response to discrimination against women in politics, the women's groups and the government have raised awareness on the need to increase women's political participation by using different means such as; workshops, print and electronic media, poster and sticker campaigns. Workshops both at the national and district level were held to motivate and encourage women to enter into politics. The MWCA and civil society organizations conducted training programmes for the female candidates who contested at the Local Government elections covering all the districts including the North and East. A training needs assessment of female members of the local government bodies was conducted to identify their training needs for capacity building and to respond to the challenges they face while working with male counterparts. Voter education programmes covering democracy and voter rights were conducted for the women's groups throughout the island in collaboration with the Election Commission.

163. The SMWCDPSE in collaboration with the University of Peradeniya continues to conduct a Certificate Course for women leaders and more than five hundred were trained including women of minority groups. Out of the total number of women participated in the trainings, 60 have got elected to the Local Government bodies. Networking between the government and the civil society organizations was intensified and a Forum was formed to plan and carry out activities according to the strengths of each organization.

164. It is to be noted that when it comes to professional services, participation of women is increasing, but it is purely based on merit, not by quotas on the basis of gender. On the other hand, active leadership roles in politics does not seem to be a preferred choice by majority of women.

165. The Sri Lanka Administrative Service (SLAS) is the largest service in Public Service and 54.44 per cent of the total service members were women in 2017.

166. Most of the high-level decision makers are from the Sri Lanka Administrative Service; both men and women have equal opportunities to enter the service as they are recruited through written examinations. In the All-Island Services, promotions are given according to seniority and merit. Recently the number of women entering the Sri Lanka Administrative Services has surpassed that of men as they have performed better at the competitive examination. They predominate in Grade 11 and 111 of the Service. As a result, the number of women functioning as Divisional Secretaries has risen from 31.7% in 2016 to 37% in 2018. Higher educational achievements of females also have contributed to realizing this status.

167. According to the Labour Force Survey 2019, from the category of Managers, Senior Officials and Legislators, 8.4 per cent were female while 7.6 per cent were male, which is an increase of female representation from 4.9% in 2016.

168. There is a decrease in the number of women appointed to the Supreme Court and High Courts in 2017 compared with figures of 2014. However, female judges represent higher echelons in the Justice sector. Please refer to Part I Common Core Document for details and statistics.

169. The number of female Principals is comparatively low compared to the large number of females in the teaching cadre.

170. The above analysis reveals that there is a gender gap at the highest decision-making level but the gap is narrowing down in civil service and at the junior levels. The societal norms and practices still impede women's upward mobility.

### **Article 8: Equal rights to represent Government**

171. The status remains the same.

### **Article 9: Equal rights regarding nationality**

172. The status remains the same.

### **Article 10: Equal rights to education**

173. The free education policy adopted since 1945 in Sri Lanka with the inclusion of numerous incentives has provided equal access to education cutting across all economic strata of the country. Participation in education has been enhanced further by regulations rendering education compulsory for the age group of 5-16 years. The Government Policy Framework Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour has emphasised creating a knowledge-based education and restructuring/ reforming of school education. The strategies in order to achieve the objectives include: introduction of a single curricular system, quality improvement, teacher training and professional development and infrastructure development in the school system.

174. There have been several donor-funded projects implemented by the Ministry of Education. The most recent Programme, the Education Sector Development Programme (2013 - 2018) focussed attention on promoting participation of girls in the new Technology stream and incorporating gender indicators in management and monitoring systems.

175. Sri Lanka has achieved near universal enrolment in basic and secondary education. Female student enrolment in the formal education is almost equal to male students at primary and junior secondary levels. Girls outnumber boys in secondary and more prominent in senior secondary level which is 55.6 % (2020). Please refer to Part I Common Core Document for details and statistics. Male school dropout rate is high as they have easy access to employment. Female literacy rate is 92.9% (2019) almost equal to male literacy rate of 93.6%.<sup>14</sup>

176. The non-schooling children are from the poorest families living in the urban and rural areas and the plantations and children with disabilities. Children from the plantations who were disadvantaged earlier, have a high participation rate at present in primary education. Education performance indicators for girls are improving and performance in public examinations is better than boys.

177. In Grade 12 and 13 girls are very much overrepresented in Arts and biological science streams, while there are more boys in physical sciences and in the technological stream. Girls represent one third of those in physical sciences. A major reason for the highest enrolment of girls in the Arts stream at A/L is that the distribution of schools offering science education as the schools are located in urban and semi urban areas.

178. In order to address the disparities in education during the period 2016-2020 the government has implemented the programme "Nearest school is the best School" to provide equal opportunities in education for all and transforming selected schools in each Divisional Secretariat division as super schools, thereby controlling the population in over-populated popular urban schools. This programme envisages developing 600 schools to represent each divisional secretariat, 1200 schools with advance level classes that are not included in other

<sup>14</sup> Department of Census and Statistics.

development programmes, 776 schools as part of a secondary school development programme, and 3577 schools under a primary schools' development project.<sup>15</sup>

179. The Ministry of Education has introduced a Technology stream for A/L students in 2013. Although the enrolment of women in vocational and technical institutes has increased the skills they obtain from these institutes are limited to those occupations which are socially determined as feminine work. Programmes are ongoing through media and awareness-raising and career counselling encouraging women to participate in non-traditional vocations.

180. According to the 2015/16 and 2016/17 university entrance statistics, the proportion of females in engineering is 22-24% while in IT, Technology Science, Architecture the average is between 40-50 percent. However, entrance of females to the Arts stream is more than 80%. The distribution of females in faculties reflects the impact of gender role stereotype internalized by girls. Of those who entered University in 2019 women comprised 64% of the total student population.<sup>16</sup>

## **Article 11: Equal rights to employment**

181. Economic empowerment of women through providing support services is a key strategy envisaged in the government policy document, Vistas and prosperity and Splendour.

182. The female labour force participation rate in 2019 has been recorded as 34.5 percent. The gender gap is wide partly as women working in the informal sector is not visible in the official statistics. Of the total female employment, 51% are working in the informal sector. Women comprised of 28.4% in the Agriculture sector, 27.6% in the Industrial sector and 47.1% in the Services sector.<sup>17</sup> Despite less female participation in the labour force women's contribution to the economy is high in sectors: export garment industry, plantation sector and labour migration. Female employment in the government sector (19.9%) has surpassed that of men (12.2%). The percentage of women holding managerial positions in All Island Services is also on the increase.

183. The national unemployment rate was estimated to be 5.4% in 2019 of which is 6.7% for women and 3.4% for men. The labour force participation of women differs considerably across education levels. The unemployment of educationally qualified females is higher than that of males. According to a study by the Institute of Policy Studies, labour force participation of highly skilled women is on par with that of males while the labour force participation of lower skilled women lags behind.

184. The Maternity Benefit Ordinance provide protection to women from dismissal during pregnancy and support their family responsibilities by the provision of maternity leave and benefits. Female officers working in the government sector are entitled to 84 days of full pay maternity leave while those in the private sector are given only 48 days. To reduce the anomaly, the 2019 Budget has proposed to support working-mothers in the private sector by encouraging the private sector to grant fifty per cent of the salary and mandatory 3 months maternity leave as an additional deduction in calculating their cooperate taxation, subject to a maximum of Rs. 20,000 per employee per month.

185. Directives have been issued by the government to set up child-care centres at workplaces and funds have been released by the Treasury to the MWCA for the refurbishing of day care centres during 2017 and 2018. The private sector has been requested to put-up day-care centres and a loan scheme was in operation for furthering the task. Childcare development was included in the Sri Lanka Vision 2025 and in 2019 Budget. The Early Childhood project of the SMWCDPSE funded by the World Bank has made a major contribution to the sector

<sup>15</sup> Sri Lanka Voluntary National Review on Sustainable Development Goals 2018.

<sup>16</sup> University Grants Commission.

<sup>17</sup> Annual Labour Force Survey, 2019.



through construction of new centres, facility improvement, teacher training, provision of teaching-learning material and other measures to improve the quality of preschool education. The Project has also embarked on a programme to renovate 600-daycare centres in the plantation sector. The Government has introduced the National Guidelines for Child Care Centres in 2017 to provide a framework to regulate the daycare centres in operation.

186. The existing social security system is comprised of fairly well-established schemes of old-age pensions and lump sum payment at retirement for public officers and workers in the formal sector and their dependents. Around 34% of the Sri Lankan population receives benefits from social protection systems.<sup>18</sup> Public service employees and their families are covered by three main schemes managed by the Department of Pensions. They are Public Servants Pension Scheme, Public Servants Provident Fund and the Widows and Orphans Pension scheme. Payments to beneficiaries of the Employment Trust Fund and Employment Provident Fund are applicable for workers in the formal private sector.

### **Article 12: Equal rights to access health care**

187. Women and men have equal access to free of charge state health services in Sri Lanka. Ministry of Health at central level is responsible for maintaining the health services of the country, while the nine Provincial Ministries are responsible for effective implementation of the services in their respective provinces. A dominant feature of the health policy in Sri Lanka is the diffusion of health services throughout the country, which provides institutional and field health care including domiciliary care. Universal access to free state health services, and the availability of a well-established network of state hospitals in the curative sector, and a package of Maternal and child health (MCH) services at the field level that extends to the level of domiciliary care established over 8 decades have had a positive impact to improve the health status of women of the country.

188. By 2018, programme had reached almost all families in the country forming a well-organized health care system with 353 Medical Officers of Health (MOH) areas.<sup>19</sup>

189. Sri Lanka provides comprehensive and evidence-based services for all healthcare needs related to pregnancy, confinement and postpartum period. All these services are provided free of charge in the government sector. Preparation of a girl for motherhood is addressed in the life cycle approach commencing in the childhood and focused services during pre-pregnancy care.

190. During pregnancy and postpartum period, women receive domiciliary care from Public Health Midwives and clinic care from Medical Officers and Consultants. Components of care received include history taking and counselling, examinations, urine and blood investigations for anemia, hyperglycaemia in pregnancy, HIV and syphilis. Coverage of these exceeds 90%. In 2019 WHO validation was granted for 'Elimination of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV and Syphilis' in Sri Lanka. Dating scans are conducted for the vast majority. Maternal weight gain and fetal growth are monitored and haematinics and calcium supplements as well as a food supplement are provided to all pregnant women during the 2nd and 3rd trimesters and first six months postpartum. A basket of food items are also provided during antenatal and postnatal periods for a duration of ten months. 99.9% of deliveries in Sri Lanka take place in institutions.

191. When providing above services, women are not discriminated based on marital status, ethnicity, geography, social class or any other non-medical factor.

192. It is significant that the system of MCH services has evolved as a part of the general health services in the country. Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child Adolescent and Youth Health programme (RMNCAYH) has been evolved over many decades. By 2018, RMNCAYH

<sup>18</sup> Department of Census and Statistics.

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka.

programme has reached almost all families in the country forming a well-organized healthcare system with 353 Medical Officer of Health (MOH) areas.

193. The Maternal and Child Health policy of Sri Lanka (2012), in its' 8<sup>th</sup> goal declares promotion of reproductive health of men and women assuring gender equity and equality. Family planning programme has been integrated with MCH services since 1960's, and included in the Maternal and Child Health policy of Sri Lanka. The policy of free family planning services is implemented for all temporary and permanent family planning methods. The contraceptive prevalence rate, using any method is over 64% (DHS, 2016).

194. A "National Strategic Plan 2019-2023 Well –Woman Programme" developed by the Family Health Bureau with support from UNFPA Sri Lanka is in place and is in line with the National Strategic Framework for Development of Health Services 2016-2025, the National Multi-sectoral Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs 2016-2020, the National Policy and Strategic Framework on Cancer Prevention and Control Sri Lanka 2015 and the commitments of the Government to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

195. Since the beginning of the HIV epidemic in the late 1980s, Sri Lanka has been classified as a country with low level HIV epidemic. Even among key populations, HIV prevalence has not exceeded beyond 5%. In this background, Sri Lanka has been exploring the possibility of achieving the targets of ending AIDS epidemic targets earlier than the global timeline.<sup>20</sup> Results of national estimates indicate that there are 3600 people living with HIV (PLHIV) in Sri Lanka in 2019. Of this estimate, 3,550 are adults who are 15 years and older, and the male to female ratio was 2.93. The trend of PLHIV is relatively stable in the past five years implying the state of balance between new infections and AIDS related deaths. (Please refer to Common Core Document for details).

### **Article 13: Equal rights in areas of economic and social life**

196. This is addressed in Article 11 and 14.

### **Article 14: Equal rights to benefit from rural development**

#### **Rural Women**

197. More than 70% of the population live in rural areas and majority of them are working in the agriculture sector. The poverty rate in the rural areas is 4.3% compared to the national average of 4.1%.<sup>21</sup> Poverty rates among rural households engaged in agriculture are higher than that of those working in the non-agricultural sector. The labour force survey of 2019 indicates that the informal sector is comprised of 53.7% females and 63.3% males. In the survey 64% rural females were classified as being economically inactive mainly engaged in housework and 6.8 % classified as unpaid family workers.

198. The Policy framework of the government 'Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour' highlights to provide support services for women engaging in self-employment activities.

199. The main government programme extended to rural areas is the "Samurdhi" development programme reaching 1.8 million people in the country. The programme comprises provision of consumption grants, savings and credit for entrepreneurial activities and rehabilitation and country's infrastructure development. There are 1074 Samurdhi Banks and 331 Samurdhi Bank societies are in operation island-wide to provide micro credit for low-income families. In the Samurdhi programme the total number of Samurdhi beneficiaries

<sup>20</sup> Technical Report of National STD and AIDS control programme 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2016.

accounts to 1,745,798 beneficiaries, out of which, 604,574 are women.<sup>22</sup> Women predominates in Samurdhi Banks and currently 2,922,731 are enrolled as members of the SamurdhiBanks.

200. The female members of the Samurdhi societies are working on social enhancement of the communities which include eradicating rural drug menace, addressing psychosocial needs, promoting organic food consumption, supporting housing development of low income families and involving children in national level cultural competitions.

201. Women's Bureau of Sri Lanka facilitates social and economic empowerment of women through provision of awareness and other socio economic support to rural women. The Women's Bureau has set up women's action societies totalling to 12,732 in 2020. These societies have been federated to 315 divisional federations and 24 district federations.

202. The Women's Bureau is engaged in providing credit and skills training for women to undertake self-employment activities. The Women's Bureau provides credit facilities for self-employment activities through revolving credit scheme, "Apeksha" credit scheme and "Wantha Shakthi" banks. During the period 2017-2020 the Women's Bureau has dispersed Rs.mil. 178 among 14,233 women of low income families to be engaged in self-employment.

203. Obtaining micro-credit by rural women from unauthorized lenders has worsened their income level. and are facing difficulties in settling the installments. To assist women caught up in the debt trap, the government has approved the write off of non-consumption loans below Rs.100,000 given to women by all registered finance companies.

204. The Department of Agrarian Services has established 24,007<sup>23</sup> Women's Agricultural Organizations known as SITHAMU at the village level for social and economic empowerment of women engaged in agricultural pursuits. A total of 588,193 women have enrolled as members. Women are encouraged to engage in organic farming, promote savings, group formation increasing knowledge and attitudes and leadership development. There are 45,233 women entrepreneurs attached to this programme and Peoples Bank has released loan facilities up to Rs 893,756,046 to improve their agricultural pursuits. The Department has established 21 restaurants all over the country to improve the living standards of the members of these organizations and to develop their entrepreneur skills while providing market facilities.

205. The policy of the MWCA on allocating 25% of the project investment on rural economic development for women has impacted positively on women's income in the rural sector. In 2018 line ministries and provincial councils have allocated Rs. 3950 million for women's projects, while Rs. 2830 million has been allocated in 2019.

206. There are three types of social insurance programmes in operation covering the informal sector which includes Farmer's pension and social benefit scheme, Fisherman's pension and social benefit security scheme, Self-employed, pension and social benefit scheme. However, these schemes are voluntary and limited in personal coverage. The government also provides monthly cash transfer programmes for low-income families and disability payment for elders over 70 years as part of the social protection for vulnerable groups. The coverage of elderly females is 46.4%.<sup>24</sup>

### **Article 15 and 16: Equal rights with regard to legal capacity in civil matters and Equal rights in respect of marriage and family relations**

207. While the status of the general marriage law in Sri Lanka remains the same, efforts are being made to advocate changes to personal laws applicable to different Communities in Sri

<sup>22</sup> Samurdhi Department.

<sup>23</sup> Department of Agrarian Services.

<sup>24</sup> Department of Census and Statistics.

Lanka through sensitization and dialogue with the respective communities and civil society organisations.

208. The Report of the Committee appointed by the Ministry of Justice in 2009 to consider and propose reforms to Muslim matrimonial law and to upgrade Quazi Courts was released recommending changes to minimum age of marriage, legal requirement for the women's consent for the marriage, legal requirement for wife's/wives' consent in instances of polygamy, eliminating differences in divorce procedure between men and women and appointment of women as Quazis and Marriage Registrars.

209. Following the appointment of the Cabinet Sub-Committee to make proposals with regard to amending the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act in October 2016, a report on the recommendations of key Muslim women's rights activists, civil society organizations and religious leaders was submitted to the Cabinet Sub-Committee.

210. Amending the MMDA as per the Committee recommendations was taken up for discussion at the Parliament Sectoral Committee on Gender in July 2019. The Parliamentarians decided to amend several core articles in the MMDA and a proposal was handed over to the Minister of Justice for further action. Accordingly, a Cabinet Paper has been submitted including the proposals that the minimum age of marriage for both the bride and the groom should be 18 years and that the bride should sign the register as a sign of her consent. The Cabinet of Ministers have approved the proposals in August 2019.

211. Amending MMDA was taken up by women's groups with the present government in 2020. Subsequent to wide- ranging discussions held with stakeholders, academics and jurists the Ministry of Justice has decided to submit a Cabinet Memorandum to amend the Act including minimum age of marriage, registration requirements, qualification for appointment of Quazis, consent for Marriage etc. At the Cabinet meeting held on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021 the Cabinet considered the recommendations made by the Cabinet Sub Committee appointed and has instructed the Minister of Justice to give directions to the Legal Draftsman(a.)to draft legislation on the age limit of Muslim marriages (b) introduce laws to abolish Quazi courts and prohibit polygamous marriages of Muslim men.

### **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**

212. During the reporting period the Government continues to make progress in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in social, economic and political fields through law reforms, formulating gender responsive policies and action plans by addressing gender related issues.

213. In line with the Beijing Platform of Action and relevant declarations, a draft National Women's Rights Policy was developed during the reporting period. The policy focuses on women's human rights and on the principles of equality and nondiscrimination substantively and inclusively in areas of: Education and Information Communication technology, Health and Wellbeing, Law and Administration of Justice, Labour, Media, Environment and Political participation. It provides an overarching framework to guide the process of developing laws, policies, programs, and projects and mechanism which will ensure equal rights and opportunities for women in all spheres encompassing all structures of government as well as in workplace, the community and family.

214. A Cabinet approved circular was disseminated to all sectoral ministries and related agencies to guarantee the collection of age and sex disaggregated data and establishing a gender sensitive monitoring system to track the Government expenditure and equal distribution of benefits to all.

215. The Policy Framework and National Plan of Action to address Sexual and Gender Based Violence was developed and the approval of the Cabinet was obtained that included a direction to ensure allocations for the effective implementation of the National Action Plan from the medium-term budgetary framework. The thirteen-line Ministries responsible for the

implementation of the Plan have included activities and allocated budgets that was secured through the Treasury. The review of the Multi Sectoral Action Plan has revealed that more than 60% of the activities stipulated in the plan have been accomplished by the respective Ministries.

216. The National Human Rights Action Plan contains provisions to address issues related to law reforms, redressing issues related to the war affected women, issues of female employment and enhancing institutional mechanisms and ministerial responsibilities in regard to gender equality and protection of women human rights. A monitoring system was in place to track the progress.

217. Gender mainstreaming is a strategy endorsed in the Beijing Platform for Action to ensure the advancement of gender equality and it was adopted by the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs by introducing a policy for Gender Mainstreaming in all sectoral ministries. This policy include: establishment of gender focal points, gender responsive budgeting and establishment of anti-sexual harassment committees. The gender mainstream process has also facilitated in mainstreaming gender equality in sectorial policies such as National Disaster Policy, National Human Resource Policy, National SME policy and the TVET policy.

218. The Government concerned on repealing discriminatory provisions in the law has taken measures to advocate changes to personal laws through sensitization and dialogue with respective communities including civil society organizations. Committees have been appointed to recommend changes to the laws with special reference to family laws. Cabinet approval was obtained to remove discriminatory provisions in the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act which includes Age of Marriage, abolishing Quazi courts and prohibiting polygamous marriages.

219. With the amendment made to Local Government Election Act providing a 25% quota for women the female representation of Local Government Bodies has increased to 22% in the elections held in 2017.

220. The policy introduced by the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs to allocate 25% of annual rural development budget for economic empowerment of women has impacted positively on women's income as revealed by the surveys conducted. There are numerous credit programs in operation to provide livelihood support for informal sector women to bring them into the fold of national economy and promote economic independence while contributing to poverty alleviation.

221. During the period 2016-2020 the government along with civil society organizations and international community have continuously supported to rebuild the war affected areas and to restore the economy, improve infrastructure and develop livelihoods. Several policy initiatives, legal enactments, action plans and programs have been introduced since then to improve the situation of those affected with special focus on women. The Report of the Consultative Task Force on Reconciliation contains recommendations to safeguard the rights of women by addressing the grievances of all victims including Truth Seeking, Reparation and measures for non-recurrence. Institutions, namely the Office of Missing Persons, Office of Reparation were established to address the needs of those affected while the Organization of National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) concentrate on socio economic needs of the affected.

222. The policy of the Government is to reduce all kinds of Sexual and Gender Based Violence against women and girls. Numerous institutions are providing number of support services and interventions for the victims of violence in the form of counselling, legal aid, safe homes, referral pathway mechanisms and hotlines. While these services are available at the National level, they are more prominent at the Divisional level with the contribution of the Women and Child Unit of MWCA, health professionals in state hospitals, women and child desks of the police stations and Attorneys at Law at the Legal Aid Commission. Community awareness programs are widely available while Human rights gender equality are addressed in the capacity development programs of law enforcement officers. All these measures have contributed to increase awareness on Violence Against Women resulting in increase of reporting VAW incidences.

223. The Ministry of Education has taken action to include gender awareness in almost all school textbooks. A media policy reflecting women's concerns was drafted for inclusion in the national media policy. Media campaigns are being launched to transform traditional norms to ensure that all are equal and free from discrimination.

### **Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals**

224. Sri Lanka shows significant progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is revealed by the 2021 Global Sustainable Development Report. According to the Report, Sri Lanka has improved its global rank by 7 positions and is placed at 87th place out of 165 countries in 2021. Overall Country Score has increased to 68.1, which is well above the regional average. In 2019 and 2020, Sri Lanka ranked at 93rd and 94th places respectively with scores of 65.8 and 66.9 respectively. No Poverty (Goal 1), Quality Education (Goal 4) and Climate Action (Goal 13) are important areas where Sri Lanka is maintaining steady progress.

225. In addition, improvement of the ratio of female-to-male mean years of education (contributing to our achievements of gender equality (Goal 5)) and improvement of Property Rights Score from 3.9 in 2019 to 4.2 in 2020 ((Property Rights (worst 1–7 best) under Goal 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) are some of the notable improvements made by Sri Lanka during the reporting period.

226. Gender Equality is identified as a cross cutting issue and is crucial for achieving the SDG overall framework. Universal access to free health and education services has contributed to gender parity in many areas envisaged in SDGs.

227. The Maternal Mortality rate has declined to 33.7 per 100,000 live births<sup>25</sup> which is below the SDG target 3.1. Achieving SDG target 3.2, under 5 mortality rate and the neonatal mortality rate in Sri Lanka were 10 and 5.8 per 100,000 live births respectively.<sup>26</sup>

228. According to the Health sector data, the proportion of women of reproductive age, who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods has increased from 78.5% in 2016 to 79.5% in 2020. This shows that Sri Lanka is progressing towards achieving SDG Target 3.7 on universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services by 2030.

229. In line with SGD target 4.1, 4.2 and 4.5 gender equality prevails in primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. The net primary enrolment rate is 99%. In early childhood education, 76% of 3–5-year-olds are undergoing some form of education.<sup>27</sup> Based on the data that is available with the Ministry of Education, the participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age) for males and females is 97.4% and 98.1% respectively. This shows that Sri Lanka has made tremendous progress in achieving SDG target 4.2 in ensuring that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education.

230. According to the most recent data, SDG Indicator 5.2.1: the proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner has decreased from 16.6% in 2016 to 14.5% in 2019, and the proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner is only 0.4% in 2019. This shows a significant progress towards eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres in Sri Lanka by 2030 (in keeping with Sri Lanka's commitments under SDG 5.2

231. SDG 8 is yet to be achieved since the country's female labour force participation remains at 34.5% while 51% of the total employed women work in the informal sector. Further, unemployment rate among women is at 6.7%. Through the implementation of social security systems and through poverty reduction policies of the government, Sri Lanka has taken actions

<sup>25</sup> Department of Census of Statistics, Status of Sustainable Development Goals.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Department of Census of Statistics, School Census 2019.

to reduce the poverty gap given in Goal 1. Poverty among females is marginally lower than that of males.<sup>28</sup> The proportion of the total female population below the poverty line is 0.70%, while about 2.8% Female Head Households were below the poverty line. 83% of women have access to financial institutions while 40% of the women belonging to the poorest category has access to them.<sup>29</sup>

232. Women represent only 5.3% in Parliament and 22% in local government bodies, creating a gap in achieving SGD 5.5. In line with SDG 5.b, computer literacy among females account for 30.4% while digital literacy rate is 46.2%.<sup>30</sup>

233. The government of Sri Lanka considers the SDGs as a priority and has incorporated the key areas in the Public Investment Plan in order to ensure their realization by 2030. In addition, the Government has established an inter-ministerial Steering Committee under the leadership of the Prime Minister to mobilize all government institutions around SDGs with the aim of accelerating SDG implementation. The Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka, as the nodal agency for coordination, facilitation and monitoring of SDG implementation in Sri Lanka has developed and launched a national SDG data portal, an integrated monitoring and reporting platform on SDG progress.

## Conclusion

234. The Government has taken action to fulfill the commitments enshrined in the Constitution and international treatise on gender equality and empowerment of women through law reforms, developing policies and action plans, adopting measures for mitigating violence against women, and introducing affirmative action for eliminating stereotypes. The civil society groups have raised their voice on gender issues through advocacy and awareness campaigns to obtain community support which has contributed to improving the situation. However, affirmative action is needed to ensure the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedom on basis of equality. Hence addressing the gaps in female labour force participation, introducing protection measures covering women in informal sector, increasing female political participation are key to achieving substantive equality enshrined in Goal 5 of Sustainable Development Goals.

---

<sup>28</sup> Department of Census of Statistics.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Department of Census and Statistics, Computer Literacy Statistics 2020 (First six months).