

Opinions on the Part concerning the Macao Special Administrative Region
In the National Report on Human Rights under the 4th Universal Periodic Review

The Women's General Association of Macau

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Founded in 1950, the Women's General Association of Macau (hereinafter referred to as the "Women's Association") is a non-profit social service organisation, with the mission of caring for women and children and serving the community. The Women's Association obtained the special consultative status to the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 2008 and has long been actively participating in international affairs and promoting the international development of women's and children's cause in the Macao SAR.

I. Guarantee of the mechanisms for gender equality and women's development

1. Gender equality is an important human right. Women's empowerment contributes to the overall health and productivity of families and communities, and of future generations. At present, in the area of political decision-making of the Macao SAR, the total number of politically participating voters in 2022 was 325,967, of which 171,253 were female voters, accounting for 52.5%¹. In addition, in 2022, there were 834 leaders and chiefs in various government services, of which 40.41% were women.
2. The Macao SAR Government completed the formulation of the "Women's Development Goals" (2019-2025) in 2019, covering 8 key areas that are conducive to the development of women in the Macao SAR. Nevertheless, due to the impact of the pandemic of the century immediately after the formulation of the relevant "Goals", according to government data, at this stage, all the 36 short-term measures (2019-2021) of the "Goals" have been implemented but some mid-term measures (2021-2023) are still in progress. On the one hand, the Women's Association urges the Government to ensure the orderly implementation of the indicators. On the other hand, since government services have not yet provided detailed information on the evaluation, impact assessment, and various women's development data on "gender mainstreaming" of the "Goals", our Association recommends that relevant services further improve their information transparency, properly optimise the assessment mechanism, plan early and continue the work of the next stage of women's development goals, formulate comprehensive and effective long-term development goals for women, and ensure the simultaneous and coordinated development of women and the economy and society.

¹ https://www.re.gov.mo/files/statistics/2023_a98/4p.pdf

II. Women and health

3. In the area of healthcare, the average life expectancy of women in the Macao SAR is 86.9 years, ranking among the top in the world. Moreover, the health centres of the Macao SAR Government provide a number of free screening tests for women. The Women's Association established a women's healthcare centre in 2009 to provide free cervical cancer screening services for Macao residents, and also to assist in providing breast health checks and cooperate with the Health Bureau to carry out AIDS screening, committed to improving the health of women in the Macao SAR.
4. Nevertheless, in the past 3 years, the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to recur, the global economy has been hit hard, and healthcare and public health in various places have been facing unprecedented challenges. Although the Macao SAR Government has taken active prevention and control measures to mobilise all sectors of society to suppress the spread of the pandemic and ensure the health and life safety of residents to the greatest extent, medical services have been adjusted during the pandemic prevention and control period. For instance, there has been short-term suspension of prenatal, postnatal and infant healthcare services, *etc.*; application for birth certificates and other certificates has been affected; the collection of identification documents or certificates has also been postponed; the vaccination for infants and toddlers, birth allowance collection and maternity leave application have all been influenced. In the face of uncertainties in the development trend of different diseases in the world, appropriate measures should be continuously taken to consistently improve healthcare capacity to ensure the orderly operation of public healthcare and administrative management, to provide greater protection in the field of women's and children's health.

III. Women and education

5. At present, the Macao SAR implements 15 years of free compulsory education, and establishes a continuing education plan for all to encourage lifelong learning for all. According to statistics from the Macao SAR Government, women account for 56% of the number of students in higher education institutions of the Macao SAR in the 2021/2022 academic year, indicating that men and women enjoy equal opportunities to receive higher education.

IV. Women and the economy

6. In respect of women's right to work and protection, under the previous joint promotion of all walks of life, including the Women's Association, women's paid maternity leave has been successfully extended and men's paid paternity leave has been introduced, providing better protection from a legal perspective for the reproductive and labour rights of residents. In order to create more favourable conditions to promote women's participation in social development, it is suggested that family-friendly concepts should be integrated into various policies.

When formulating laws and public policies, families should be more considered, family development should be supported, family functions should be stabilised, further unleashing the female labour force.

7. In 2022, the Women's Association conducted a survey on "Macao women's willingness to have children" and found that 80% of the interviewed women believed that busy work, parenting problems, high childcare expenses and insufficient living space were the reasons affecting their willingness to have children, and 90% of the interviewed women believed that family-friendly policies were the most effective means to increase their willingness to have children. To this end, the Women's Association has been committed to suggesting the authorities to continue to review the implementation of the Labour Relations Law, to gradually implement various family-friendly measures through laws, and actively encourage enterprises to introduce innovative family-friendly systems to support dual-career families and reduce the burden of childbearing and childcare on residents.

V. Guarantee of the rule of law for gender equality and women's development

8. Law 2/2016 on Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence entered into force in the Macao SAR in 2016. The Women's Association has a Lai Yen Centre to provide shelter for battered women and children. In addition, the facility also participates in basic training courses on dealing with cases involving domestic violence spouse, organises lectures and workshops on different themes, *etc.*, to enhance social awareness of domestic violence prevention and provide support to those in need.
9. According to international experience, during the pandemic of infectious diseases in the past 3 years, various levels of control measures have been implemented around the world, resulting in changes in lifestyles with gradual increase of emotional and life pressures, which may heighten tension within families and increase the risk of domestic violence. In April 2020, the Secretary-General of the United Nations made an appeal and called attention to the relevant situation around the world². Looking at the Macao SAR, according to statistics, there were 81 suspected domestic violence cases³ in the Macao SAR in 2021, and 38 cases in 2020. After pandemic prevention and control and with the improvement of social environment, in the first half of 2022, the number of domestic violence cases continued to decrease. The Judiciary Police handled a total of 53 cases of *ad hoc* investigations of harmful acts among family members, and finally confirmed that 6 cases were in line with the crime of domestic violence. It can be seen that the social environment has a certain influence on domestic violence. It is recommended to continue to analyse the relevant cases of domestic violence and review existing legal measures to prevent and combat domestic violence, and appropriately introduce certain measures or actions for improvement or optimisation.

² <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/2020/April/the-secretary-generals-statement-on-gender-based-violence-and-covid19.html>

³ https://www.ias.gov.mo/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/2023-03-13_172925_18.pdf (Chinese only)

10. As regards social welfare, the Macao SAR Government is currently studying that couples with minor children may apply for divorce by mutual consent through the Registry Office. In order to protect the interests of minors, the draft law stipulates that the Public Prosecutions Office must examine the divorce agreements by mutual consent, in order that it may intervene in accordance with law when the contents of the agreements are not conducive to the minors. At the same time, the reform of non-judicial litigation of family cases is being studied, and the feasibility of transferring specific cases in this field to entities other than the courts is being explored but the policy still needs to be implemented. The Women's Association has been committed to promoting family mediation services. It is recommended that through the efforts of the Government and civil society organisations, co-parenting should be promoted and the support needs of divorced families in the Macao SAR and the well-being of their children should be effectively enhanced.

VI. International exchange and cooperation for gender equality and women's development

11. The Women's Association obtained the special consultative status to the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 2008 and has, for many years, been actively implementing international conventions and instruments on gender equality and women's development, carrying out extensive multilateral and bilateral exchanges and cooperation in the field of women, exchanging information on the progress of the Macao society and women on the international stage, and contributing to the promotion of gender equality and playing an active role in strengthening women's economic empowerment.

12. Concerning the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Women's Association drafts and submits NGO reports and conducts diversified exchange and dialogue activities on topics related to gender equality and women's development.

13. In order to support and encourage young people to participate in international affairs, the Women's Association supported the organisation of the "International Affairs Training Programme for Young Women", which has accumulatively provided training for more than 600 participants by 2022. It is recommended to strengthen its exchanges and mutual visits with Mainland China and other countries and regions, further provide regional cooperation, national development planning and other information, support, encourage and assist in a flexible manner in the establishment of communication platforms among different youth groups, and enhance youth's understanding and awareness of multiculturalism in different places, promote the respect, acceptance and tolerance of multiculturalism.