



SUBMISSION TO THE OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Report on: Human Rights Challenges in Addressing and Countering All Aspects of the World Drug Problem, in Particular the Impact of Drug Policies on the Rights of Women and Girls

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About Oman Human Rights Commission:

Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) was established in 2008 under Royal Decree No. (124/2008) as an independent national body tasked with promoting a culture of human rights and working to protect and safeguard them within the Sultanate of Oman. Emphasizing the importance and standing of the Commission, Royal Decree No. (57/2022) was issued to reorganize it and establish a new framework for its operations, elevating it to full independence in carrying out its functions as the national mechanism responsible for the protection and promotion of human rights at both the local and international levels. The Commission's mandates include the following:

1. Developing a national strategy for human rights and monitoring its implementation in coordination with all relevant authorities.
2. Monitoring the protection of human rights and freedoms in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the Basic Statute of the State, international treaties and conventions to which Oman is a party, and applicable laws.
3. Monitoring observations raised by foreign governments, international organizations, and NGOs regarding human rights in Oman, and coordinating with the concerned authorities to verify and respond to them.
4. Providing advice to state authorities on matters related to human rights and freedoms, and contributing to the preparation of reports on these issues.
5. Monitoring any violations or abuses related to human rights in Oman and assisting in their resolution.
6. Conducting field visits to prisons, detention centers, hospitals, and labor gatherings to monitor human rights conditions therein.
7. Receiving human rights complaints, studying them, making recommendations to the competent authorities, and following up on their outcomes.
8. Cooperating with international human rights mechanisms, preparing reports, and participating in regional and international human rights meetings.



9. Organizing conferences, workshops, and seminars on human rights in coordination with the relevant authorities.
10. Representing the Sultanate of Oman in regional and international conferences, events, and meetings related to human rights.

Introduction

OHRC notes that Oman has maintained a firm commitment to balancing effective drug control with the protection of human rights, including the rights of women and girls. The Sultanate's approach is anchored in its National Strategy for Combating Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, the Penal Code, and a range of social protection programmes overseen by the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Health, and the Royal Oman Police. This submission addresses each of the three thematic areas set out in the OHCHR's call for inputs.

I. Laws, Regulations, Policies and Programmes

OHRC notes that Oman's primary legislative framework for drug control is contained in the Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Law (Royal Decree 17/1999, as amended). The law criminalizes trafficking, possession, and use of controlled substances. Importantly, it provides for compulsory treatment and rehabilitation as an alternative to prosecution for individuals found guilty of personal use, a provision that is applied in practice and reflects a health-centered approach. Most recently, Royal Decree No. 24/2023 re-designated the National Committee for Combating Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances and elevated it to report directly to the National Security Council, underscoring the highest-level political commitment to addressing the drug problem. The Committee's mandate encompasses proposing national drug policy, developing prevention and treatment plans, initiating legislative reforms, coordinating between governmental and non-governmental bodies, conducting scientific research, and exchanging regional and international expertise. The National Strategy for Combating Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances 2023–2028 serves as the overarching road map. It consolidates national efforts through three core programme streams: (i) prevention programmes targeting the general population, school students, university students, and at-risk youth through lectures, workshops, and family guidance; (ii) treatment and rehabilitation programmes, including the opening of dedicated addiction treatment windows across all governorates, the establishment of specialized treatment and rehabilitation centers in Muscat, North Al Batinah, and Dhofar (major governorates), and the strengthening of aftercare and community services; and (iii) studies, research, and monitoring, including development of a centralized addiction registry and support for academic research in the field.

Oman is a state party to the 1961, 1971, and 1988 United Nations drug control conventions and reports regularly to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. Oman's commitments under CEDAW also inform the gender-sensitive application of drug-



related laws, with the OHRC monitoring implementation and engaging with treaty bodies accordingly.

With respect to women and girls specifically, OHRC notes that Oman applies several protective measures:

- Women in detention on drug-related charges are held in dedicated women's facilities, consistent with the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners (Bangkok Rules).
- Pregnant women and nursing mothers held on drug-related offences receive specialized healthcare, including prenatal and postnatal care, provided through the prison health facility and Ministry of Health's services.
- The Ministry of Health leads the provision of treatment and rehabilitation services. Al Masarra Hospital in the Wilayat of Amerat (Muscat Governorate) is the largest dedicated governmental addiction treatment facility in the country in terms of inpatient capacity. Complementing it, Al Amerat Rehabilitation Centre (Al Taafi Houses) provides psychological, social, and vocational rehabilitation services. Across the country, 16 specialized psychiatric outpatient clinics located in various governorates offer accessible community-level care. New Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres has opened in 2025 in Muscat and Sohar, with a further centre planned for Dhofar Governorate, substantially increasing national coverage. The private sector also plays a complementary role: licensed facilities provide additional addiction treatment and rehabilitation services. Women are treated in separate wards with access to female counsellors and social workers across all public facilities.
- The National Programme for Combating Drugs integrates awareness-raising campaigns in schools, mosques, and community centres, with materials tailored to address women's and girls' vulnerabilities, including the risk of coercion into drug use by intimate partners or family members. The Royal Oman Police, through its Directorate General for Combating Narcotics, employs advanced surveillance and interdiction methods to prevent drug smuggling and has played a central role in detecting and disrupting trafficking networks in coordination with coast guard and military authorities. The Public Prosecution's dedicated Drug Cases Directorate handles cases with a focus on treatment diversion for users including women and girls, and maintains ongoing coordination with governmental and civil society institutions working on drug-related issues.

II. Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Drug Policies and Programmes

OHRC notes that Oman has undertaken steps to embed a gender perspective throughout the development and implementation of drug policies and programmes, though this remains an evolving area.



Good Practices

- The National Committee for Combating Narcotics includes representatives from the Ministry of Social Development, which has a dedicated Directorate for Women and Family Affairs. This institutional link ensures that policies account for women's social roles and vulnerabilities.
- Treatment and rehabilitation programmes are evaluated using gender-disaggregated data, enabling the Ministry of Health to assess outcomes for women separately and refine services accordingly. The OHRC has advocated for the expansion of this data collection to cover the enforcement chain from arrest through sentencing.
- The Ministry of Education, in partnership with the Prevention Committee, implements the "Fawasil" programme in schools across all governorates — an internationally developed, evidence-based curriculum adapted to Omani educational standards in collaboration with MENTOR Arabia. Fawasil builds students' knowledge of drug risks, strengthens personal resilience, and develops life skills through an interactive curriculum directed at both students and their parents. The Ministry of Social Development, in partnership with the Prevention Committee, oversees the "Takayuf" National Programme for Social Rehabilitation of Recovered Addicts and their Families, which provides aftercare services including counselling, social reintegration support, and family guidance to help recovered individuals sustain their recovery within their family and community environments. The annual Community Competition for Reducing Drug Prevalence, active since 2015 across all governorates, engages communities in developing local prevention projects and initiatives; in 2024, 28 wilayats participated with prevention projects and community initiatives. The Ministry of Information, through television, radio, press, online platforms, and social media, produces diverse awareness materials and organizes events in cooperation with law enforcement, health, and anti-narcotics bodies to reinforce family, school, and community roles in prevention.
- The Royal Oman Police works at all events to raise community awareness about the dangers of drugs through a mobile awareness bus.

Challenges

- Social stigma remains a significant barrier to women seeking treatment voluntarily. Cultural norms can make it difficult for women to acknowledge substance use disorders, leading to delayed or absent engagement with health services.
- While progress has been made in data collection, comprehensive nationwide gender-disaggregated statistics across all stages of the drug policy cycle (prevention, law enforcement, prosecution, treatment, and reintegration) are not yet routinely published, limiting evidence-based policymaking.



III. Addressing Women and Girls Subject to Multiple Forms of Discrimination

The OHRC recognizes that drug combatting laws and their enforcement can compound existing inequalities when applied without sensitivity to the disadvantages faced by particular groups of women and girls. Oman has taken the following measures to mitigate such risks:

- **Foreign Women Workers:** Oman hosts a large foreign worker population, among whom women in domestic work are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and coerced drug use. The Ministry of Labour and the Royal Oman Police have established referral pathways to ensure that working women facing drug-related charges receive consular notification and access to legal representation. The OHRC monitors cases involving foreign workers and liaises with relevant bodies and embassies.
- **Women Experiencing Domestic Violence:** Cases where women are subject to domestic violence because of the use of drugs receive comprehensive support. The Dar Al Wifaq shelter for domestic violence survivors offers integrated psychosocial support that includes screening and referral for substance use disorders, ensuring that survivors are not re-traumatized by criminal justice responses.
- **Young Women and Girls:** The minimum age of criminal responsibility and provisions for juvenile justice under the Law on Juvenile Accountability ensure that girls involved in drug offences are directed to protective and rehabilitative measures rather than punitive ones. Dedicated juvenile facilities include counselling programmes with female staff.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Oman Human Rights Commission encourages the OHCHR report to highlight the following priorities for states:

- Enhance treatment accessibility by enhancing enrolling capacity in governmental treatment centers.
- Evaluate and further strengthen policies, systems, and methodologies used in government institutions for the rehabilitation of individuals undergoing drug addiction treatment.
- Develop prison-based rehabilitation programs for individuals (including women) with drug addiction in central prisons, and identify effective mechanisms to prevent relapse and support long-term recovery after release.



- Collect and publish gender-disaggregated data at every stage of drug law enforcement, treatment, and reintegration to enable evidence-based, rights-compliant policymaking.
- Ensure that treatment and rehabilitation services are genuinely accessible to women, including by addressing stigma, offering child-care support, and deploying female staff.
- Promote the implementation of the Bangkok Rules in all facilities holding women on drug-related charges.