



General Assembly

Distr.: General
14 March 2024
English
Original: French

Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

New Caledonia

Working paper prepared by the Secretariat

Contents

| | <i>Page</i> |
|---|-------------|
| The Territory at a glance | 3 |
| I. Constitutional, political and legal issues | 5 |
| II. Budget | 9 |
| III. Economic conditions | 10 |
| A. General | 10 |
| B. Mineral resources | 11 |
| C. Construction and manufacturing | 12 |
| D. Agriculture and fisheries | 12 |
| E. Transport and communications | 12 |
| F. Tourism | 13 |
| IV. Social conditions | 13 |
| A. General | 13 |
| B. Employment | 14 |
| C. Education | 15 |
| D. Health | 16 |

Note: The information contained in the present working paper has been derived from public sources, including those of the territorial Government, and from information transmitted to the Secretary-General by the administering Power on 12 December 2023 under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations. Further details are contained in previous working papers available from www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/documents/workingpapers.



| | | |
|-------|--|----|
| V. | Environment | 17 |
| VI. | Relations with international organizations and partners. | 17 |
| VII. | Position of the administering Power | 18 |
| VIII. | Consideration of the question by the United Nations | 18 |
| A. | Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples | 18 |
| B. | Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) | 19 |
| C. | Action taken by the General Assembly | 19 |
| Annex | | |
| | Map of New Caledonia | 20 |

The Territory at a glance

Territory: New Caledonia is a Non-Self-Governing Territory under the Charter of the United Nations, administered by France. New Caledonia has the status of a sui generis collectivity (*collectivité*) under the French Constitution and has enhanced autonomy.

Representative of administering Power: Louis Le Franc, High Commissioner of the Republic (since 6 February 2023).

Geography: New Caledonia is located in the Pacific Ocean, about 1,500 kilometres east of Australia and 1,800 kilometres north of New Zealand, and 17,000 kilometres from France. It comprises the main island (Grande Terre), the Isle of Pines, the Bélep Archipelago, Huon and Surprise, the Chesterfield Islands and the Belone Reefs, the Loyalty Islands (Maré, Lifou, Tyga, Beautemps-Beaupré and Ouvéa), Walpole Island, the Astrolabe Islands, the Matthew Island and Fearn or Hunter Island, as well as islets close to the shore. It also has several uninhabited islets to the north of the Loyalty Islands.

Land area: 18,575 square kilometres (the Territory as a whole); 16,750 square kilometres (Grande Terre).

Exclusive economic zone: 1,422,543 square kilometres.

Population: 268,500 (1 January 2023).

Life expectancy at birth: Women: 79.1 years; men: 72.9 years (2021).

Ethnic composition: 41.2 per cent Melanesians (mainly Kanaks); 24.1 per cent persons of European origin, mainly French; 8.3 per cent Wallisians and Futunians; 2 per cent Tahitians; 1.4 per cent Indonesians; 0.8 per cent Vietnamese; 0.9 per cent Vanuatians; and 21.3 per cent populations classified by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies as “others” (2019).

Languages: The official language is French. About 27 Kanak vernacular languages are spoken in geographically distinct regions. Under the Agreement on New Caledonia signed in Nouméa on 5 May 1998 (Nouméa Accord), Kanak languages and French are the languages of instruction and culture.

Capital: Nouméa, located in the south of Grande Terre.

Head of the territorial Government: Louis Mapou (since 8 July 2021).

Political groups (at the Territorial Congress): Rassemblement; Loyalistes; Calédonie Ensemble; Union calédonienne-Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste et Nationalistes; and Union nationale pour l'indépendance.

Elections: The most recent national elections were held on 10 and 24 April 2022 (presidential), 12 and 19 June 2022 (legislative) and 24 September 2023 (Senate). The most recent local elections were held on 12 May 2019 (provincial) and 15 March and 28 June 2020 (first and second rounds of municipal elections).

Legislature: Congress of New Caledonia.

Gross domestic product per capita: 30,509 euros (2021).

Unemployment rate: 13.3 per cent (2020).

Economy: Mining industry (mainly nickel), construction, trade and services.

Monetary unit: Pacific franc or CFP franc (1,000 CFP francs = 8.38 euros, at a fixed exchange rate).

Brief history: In 1774, the British captain James Cook discovered Grande Terre and named it “New Caledonia”. France annexed New Caledonia on 24 September 1853. In 1942, the United States of America decided to set up one of its military bases for the Pacific in New Caledonia. Some 20,000 New Zealand soldiers were stationed in New Caledonia during the Second World War. In 1946, France made New Caledonia an overseas Territory with limited autonomy. In the 1970s, supporters of independence were highly active, leading to violence during the 1980s known as the “événements” (events). In 1988, the Matignon Agreements led to the establishment of three provinces with the aim of restoring the balance of power. Ten years later, in 1998, the Nouméa Accord provided for the holding of three referendums on the Territory’s accession to full sovereignty, which took place on 4 November 2018, 4 October 2020 and 12 December 2021. The question posed was as follows: “*Do you want New Caledonia to accede to full sovereignty and become independent?*”.

I. Constitutional, political and legal issues

1. New Caledonia is a *sui generis* collectivity within the French Republic, governed under the provisions of part XIII of the Constitution (“Transitional provisions pertaining to New Caledonia”). The French Minister of the Interior and Overseas Territories, supported by the Junior Minister for Overseas Territories, has responsibility for New Caledonia and, in that capacity, oversees the coordination and implementation of the actions of the Government of France in accordance with the Territory’s status and organization. The current Minister of the Interior and Overseas Territories is Gérald Darmanin, appointed on 6 July 2020, and the current Junior Minister for Overseas Territories is Marie Guévenoux, appointed on 8 February 2024. The administering Power is represented in the Territory by a High Commissioner, who exercises the authority of the French Republic in New Caledonia. That position is currently held by Louis Le Franc. Under Organic Act No. 99-209 of 19 March 1999 concerning New Caledonia, the administering Power retains prerogatives in a number of areas, including diplomacy, immigration and alien control, currency, the Treasury, defence, justice, and maintenance of law and order. In the area of defence, the High Commissioner and the Commander of the Armed Forces of New Caledonia perform the functions prescribed by the relevant legislation. New Caledonia has an air force base, a navy base and one infantry regiment, with a total of around 1,450 military personnel. The Armed Forces of New Caledonia conduct the sovereign missions of the administering Power and provide support to the territorial Government in the exercise of its civilian security responsibilities. The administering Power is responsible for the maintenance of law and order, discharged by some 550 national police officers and around 855 members of the gendarmerie (including four mobile gendarmerie squadrons).

2. The Territory is part of the metropolitan judicial system of the administering Power, with some special features, such as the obligation to use customary judges in civilian courts in cases involving disputes between persons with customary civil status. The Court of Appeal is located in the capital, Nouméa. Appeals on points of law can be filed with the French Court of Cassation.

3. New Caledonia has a 54-member Congress (28 women and 26 men) drawn from the elected membership of the three provincial assemblies (15 of the 22 members of the North Province assembly, 32 of the 40 members of the South Province assembly and 7 of the 14 members of the Loyalty Islands Province assembly).

4. As at 12 December 2023, the 54 members of Congress are distributed as follows: (a) Union calédonienne-Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste et Nationalistes (14 seats); (b) Loyalistes (12 seats); (c) Union nationale pour l’indépendance (11 seats); (d) Rassemblement (6 seats); (e) the Calédonie Ensemble group (6 seats); and (f) five independent members.

5. Political parties in New Caledonia are essentially divided between those favouring New Caledonia remaining part of the French Republic and those favouring independence, with a number of shades within each stripe. There are also coalitions of actors and political parties within each stripe. According to the administering Power, the main political parties that support independence include the following: Dynamique autochtone; Dynamique unitaire Sud; Mouvement des océaniens indépendantistes; Mouvement nationaliste indépendantiste et socialiste; Rassemblement démocratique océanien (RDO); Parti de libération kanak (Palika); the Labour Party; Union progressiste en Mélanésie (UPM); and Union calédonienne (UC). The Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste (FLNKS) is a pro-independence political grouping of four parties: UC, Palika, RDO and UPM. The Union nationale pour l’indépendance (UNI) is a political coalition formed by Palika and UPM. The main

political parties that are in favour of remaining part of the French Republic are Calédonie Ensemble, Générations NC, Mouvement populaire calédonien, Rassemblement-Les Républicains; Rassemblement national, Les Républicains calédoniens and Tous calédoniens. The political groups that are in favour of remaining in the French Republic are the Loyalists group (which includes Les Républicains calédoniens, Mouvement populaire calédonien and Générations NC) and the Rassemblement group (which includes Rassemblement-Les Républicains, Rassemblement national and Tous calédoniens). In addition, two political parties are unaffiliated: Éveil océanien and Construire autrement.

6. In accordance with the Nouméa Accord, a set of institutions has been established to confirm the full recognition of the Kanak identity and culture. There are eight customary councils representing eight customary regions. In addition, a Territory-wide customary Senate with a rotating presidency comprises 16 members, with each customary council selecting two members. Under article 143 of Organic Act No. 99-209, the Senate is consulted on all matters relating to the Kanak identity but has no normative power. In accordance with article 147 of the Organic Act, the Senate has a budget for its operations.

7. The Government is elected by the Congress on the basis of a proportional system and comprises 11 members. The seventeenth Government of New Caledonia was elected on 17 February 2021, following the resignation of the pro-independence members of the previous Government on 2 February 2021. It is made up of four members presented by Rassemblement, three members from the joint group of Union calédonienne-Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste et Nationalistes and Éveil océanien, three from Union nationale pour l'indépendance, and one from Calédonie Ensemble. The Government is composed of one woman and 10 men.

8. The Kanak independence movement was launched in the 1970s, in response to the process of decolonization in Africa and Oceania and as a reaction to the large movements of people from metropolitan France in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1984, the Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste was founded as an umbrella organization for the pro-independence parties and, later that year, it established a provisional independent Government. Between 1984 and 1988, about 80 people died in violent confrontations between pro- and anti-independence elements. The violence was eventually halted with the conclusion of the Matignon Agreements on 26 June 1988 between the Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste, the anti-independence Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République and the Government of France. Information on the Matignon Agreements and the Nouméa Accord, concluded in 1998, is available in previous working papers prepared by the Secretariat. The full text of the Nouméa Accord is contained in the annex to the working paper published in 1998 (A/AC.109/2114).

9. Under the Nouméa Accord, France agreed to transfer certain non-sovereign powers and a number of institutions to the Government of New Caledonia between 1998 and 2018. All institutions with the exception of the Rural Development and Land Management Agency have been transferred, along with all powers other than those in the following three areas envisaged in article 27 of Organic Act No. 99-209: (a) rules governing the administration of provinces, municipalities and their public institutions, legal oversight of the provinces, municipalities and their public institutions, and accounting and financial regulations for local authorities and their public institutions; (b) higher education; and (c) broadcasting. The Congress, which may request the transfer of the powers referred to in article 27 of Act No. 99-209, has yet to do so. The administering Power indicated that it had transferred to the Government and the provinces, through Organic Act No. 99-209, powers concerning access to and management of natural resources, including the regulation and exercise of the rights of exploration, exploitation, management and conservation of natural

resources on land and in the exclusive economic zone; and regulations for hydrocarbons, nickel, chromium, cobalt and rare earth elements.

10. The Nouméa Accord provided for the holding of one to three referendums on accession to full sovereignty by New Caledonia.

11. The Government of France sets the referendum date (article 216 of Act No. 99-209). On 27 March 2018, at the meeting of the Committee of Signatories to the Nouméa Accord – a regular meeting that brings together heads of institutions, political groups and members of the Congress, among others – the New Caledonian political partners, in agreement with the State, finalized the question to be asked for the referendum, which was formulated as follows: “Do you want New Caledonia to accede to full sovereignty and become independent?”.

12. Following a meeting of the Committee of Signatories on 2 November 2017, and in order to enable the populations concerned to participate in the referendum on accession by New Caledonia to full sovereignty, the French Parliament adopted Organic Act No. 2018-280 of 19 April 2018 concerning the referendum, and its implementing decrees were issued by the Government of France in April and May 2018. According to the administering Power, the exceptional package of measures adopted in 2018 had several purposes: (a) establishing a procedure for automatic inclusion on the general electoral roll; (b) establishing periods for additional revisions of the three electoral rolls in New Caledonia; (c) allowing automatic inclusion for a category of voters whose property and personal ties are presumed to be mainly in New Caledonia; (d) establishing offshore polling stations in Nouméa for voters from the municipalities of Bélep, the Isle of Pines, Lifou, Maré and Ouvéa; and (e) establishing a special mechanism, as an exception to the general law, for voting by proxy.

13. The referendum on the accession to full sovereignty of New Caledonia held on 4 November 2018 saw a turnout of 81.01 per cent of voters, or 141,099 voters out of 174,165 registered voters, in 284 polling stations. The results of the vote, announced on 7 November 2018 by the Commission Overseeing the Organization and Conduct of the Referendum on the accession of New Caledonia to full sovereignty, led to the rejection of full sovereignty and independence by 78,734 voters, or 56.67 per cent of the votes cast. The number of voters who voted for full sovereignty and independence was 60,199, or 43.33 per cent of the votes cast.

14. In June 2019, a new referendum was requested, by both the elected members of the group Avenir en confiance and those of Union nationale pour l'indépendance and Union calédonienne-Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste. The Committee of Signatories to the Nouméa Accord met on 10 October 2019, with the Prime Minister of France as Chair, to determine the arrangements for the second referendum, the date of which was set for 6 September 2020. Owing to the health crisis related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the referendum was postponed to 4 October 2020. In preparation for the second referendum, two decrees were adopted: Decree No. 2020-776 of 24 June 2020 specifies that the system of specific proxies and the establishment of offshore polling stations in Nouméa for voters in the island province will be continued, with some procedural improvements as requested by the nineteenth Committee of Signatories to the Nouméa Accord. These provisions were updated by Decree No. 2020-127 of 14 February 2020 in order to determine, on the one hand, the exceptional arrangements for voting by proxy and, on the other hand, the arrangements for voting in Nouméa for voters in island municipalities, in the context of the referendum on accession by New Caledonia to full sovereignty scheduled for 2020.

15. The second referendum on the accession to full sovereignty of New Caledonia was held on 4 October 2020, with a turnout of 85.69 per cent of voters, or 154,918 voters out of 180,799 registered voters, in 304 polling stations. The results were

announced on 5 October 2020 by the Commission Overseeing the Organization and Conduct of the Referendum. The administering Power reported that the results of the vote had led to the rejection of full sovereignty and independence by 81,503 voters, or 53.26 per cent of the votes cast. The number of voters who voted for full sovereignty and independence was 71,533, or 46.74 per cent of the votes cast.

16. In accordance with the provisions of the Nouméa Accord and the Organic Act, on 8 April 2021 the pro-independence political groups represented in the Congress of New Caledonia, representing more than one third of the elected representatives, requested that a third and final referendum be held.

17. The Government of France organized political discussions from 26 May to 1 June 2021 in Paris, in which political groups participated and at the end of which a third referendum on 12 December 2021 was announced. According to the administering Power, these discussions also addressed the consequences of the vote and led to the distribution of an information document to the population. This document was presented on 16 July 2021 to elected officials, the press, civil society and the customary authorities of the Territory.

18. At the request of the Congress of New Caledonia, the third and final referendum on the accession to full sovereignty of New Caledonia, provided for in the Nouméa Accord, was held on 12 December 2021. The turnout was 43.87 per cent of voters, or 80,881 voters out of 184,364 registered voters, in 307 polling stations. The results were announced on 13 December by the Commission Overseeing the Organization and Conduct of the Referendum. The administering Power reported that the results of the vote had led to the rejection of full sovereignty and independence by 75,720 voters, or 96.50 per cent of the votes cast. The number of voters who voted for full sovereignty and independence was 2,747, or 3.50 per cent of the votes cast.

19. According to the administering Power, the Commission stated that the low turnout, which was related to a call for non-participation by pro-independence political groups and parties, did not affect the fairness and sincerity of the referendum, for which voting was not compulsory and there was no minimum turnout requirement. The results of the referendum were appealed before the Council of State by the Customary Senate, the Customary Council of the Drubea Kapumë area and a number of voters. The Council of State came to the conclusion that the arguments presented by the petitioners should be rejected (Council of State, Nos. 459711 and 459753, 3 June 2022). In accordance with the Nouméa Accord, the partners “shall meet to consider the situation thus created” following the third referendum.

20. There are several electorates in New Caledonia: the general electorate, the special electorate for elections to the Congress and the provincial assemblies, and a special electorate called upon to participate in the final status referendums under the Nouméa Accord. To be included on the special electoral roll for the referendum, all persons must meet at least one of the criteria established in Organic Act No. 99-209.

21. Every year, the special electoral rolls of voters eligible to participate in the election of members of the Congress and the assemblies are updated by special administrative commissions headed by members of the judiciary. These commissions also include a representative of the Administration appointed by the High Commissioner of the Republic, a representative of the mayor of the municipality and two representatives of voters in the municipality (one pro-independence voter and one anti-independence voter).

22. In order to ease possible tensions, a team of experts from the United Nations has been mobilized every year since 2016 to sit on the administrative commissions as independent qualified persons. The team of experts issues reports at the end of each

annual review. In addition, the United Nations Secretariat deployed experts to monitor the conduct of the three referendums.

23. In 2023, two audits were carried out at the request of certain political parties: one on the results of the Nouméa Accord, the other on decolonization. Six areas of study were audited: free choice of institutional status and economic, social and cultural development; control by the people over their natural resources and their preservation; non-use of force; international cooperation; migratory flows; and other criteria in response to action plans to eliminate colonialism.

II. Budget

24. The financial situation of the collectivity, which has been deteriorating since 2012, has been worsened by the health crisis, with a high level of debt.

25. New Caledonia is primarily a redistributive collectivity. It collects taxes on behalf of local authorities and public bodies and redistributes 83.23 per cent of the sums raised. Given the scale of non-discretionary spending, in particular payments to local authorities, but also structural spending, including on staff and public institutions, it has only limited fiscal space, which is insufficient to balance its social accounts. According to the administering Power, the issue of how to create resources (by controlling expenditure or increasing taxation) is still being considered. At the end of 2023, the administering Power granted exceptional aid of 37 million euros to avoid an interruption in payments related to the local pension fund for civil servants and the disability and loss of autonomy scheme, and to provide financial support to the hospital sector.

26. New fiscal measures are being developed to enable a return to financial equilibrium.

27. Faced with the health crisis linked to COVID-19 and the consequences of the measures taken to limit the spread of the virus, the Government of New Caledonia drew up a plan to safeguard the Caledonian economy, which includes the following elements: the deferral of social security and tax contributions; an increase in partial unemployment benefits; exceptional expenditure to manage the crisis; the purchase of sanitary items; and payment for the costs of repatriation and hotel quarantine. In 2022, it received two State-guaranteed loans from the French Development Agency totalling 240 million euros in 2020 and 175 million euros in 2022. The loans enabled the Government of New Caledonia to finance its plan to safeguard the New Caledonian economy, to cope with losses in tax revenue and to reduce social security deficits.

28. In accordance with the terms to which this State guarantee was subject, New Caledonia has committed to a programme of reforms to be adopted in order to guarantee the sustainability of the loan repayment, as well as the principle and procedures for allocating part of New Caledonia's revenue, corresponding to the annual loan principal and interest, for the repayment of the loan guarantee.

29. The year 2022 saw the end of the crisis, driven by a recovery in consumption, investment and employment. Public accounts benefited from the rebound in activity, which led to a recovery in tax collection.

30. However, financial imbalances persist. Four years of negative economic growth have squeezed budgets and worsened the financial situation of social accounts (the unified health and maternity insurance scheme, unemployment and pensions), while the repayment of French Development Agency loans is putting New Caledonia under strain and the situation of semi-public development companies is worrying for the

provinces. With an estimated debt ratio of over 190 per cent in 2022, the Territory's room for manoeuvre is limited. Structural reforms are slow to take hold.

31. The administering Power put in place several national measures applicable in New Caledonia to assist businesses experiencing cash flow difficulties as a result of the health crisis (a solidarity fund, ad hoc cash flow assistance for companies and State-guaranteed loans). State-guaranteed loans totalling 76 million euros (9.1 billion CFP francs) were granted in 2021. In 2021, 9,900 beneficiaries were partially unemployed (compared with 12,600 in 2020), representing a cost of approximately 25 million euros (3 billion CFP francs).

III. Economic conditions

A. General

32. The administering Power reports that New Caledonia has one of the richest economies of all the Pacific islands, with a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of 31,708 euros in 2022. This is partly due to the importance of nickel mining and processing to the economy of the collectivity. The outputs of the metallurgical and mining industries account for 93 per cent of exports by volume. However, there are still significant geographical disparities in income distribution: 90 per cent of total expenditures and resources are concentrated in the South Province, which represents 75 per cent of the population of the Territory, while the North Province accounts for 18 per cent of the population and the Loyalty Islands Province only 7 per cent. The economy is highly dependent on financial transfers from the Government of France. In 2021, such payments amounted to over 1.63 billion euros (195 billion CFP francs), representing approximately 20 per cent of the GDP of New Caledonia. By comparison, the contribution of the nickel sector to wealth creation was estimated at 9 per cent of GDP in 2021. A large part of the State's financial transfers to the New Caledonian authorities are made under development contracts.

33. The business environment of the New Caledonian economy darkened again in the third quarter of 2023, for the fourth consecutive quarter. Difficulties in the nickel sector, the structural challenges facing the working capital of the collectivity, the situation of the unified health and maternity insurance scheme and of the local pension fund, and the financial difficulties of the North Hospital are all weighing on the general mood. Nevertheless, according to the administering Power, employment remains high and inflation has slowed significantly.

34. The main investment drivers used by the Government of France are based on the following tools:

(a) **Development contracts**, which, in 2023, were in their sixth round since their creation by the Matignon Accords. Since 1990, the State has signed contracts worth over 2.5 billion euros (261 billion CFP francs). The State budget has committed 2.2 billion euros (226 billion CFP francs) to such contracts over the last 33 years. The current round of 10 development contracts benefits all the local authorities of the Territory (33 communes, three provinces and New Caledonia). The 2017–2023 round of development contracts follows on from the five previous contracts. The focus of such contracts is set out in the Organic Act of 19 March 1999, which states that “the activities and operations provided for in the contracts should promote access to initial and continuing training, the integration of young people, economic development, improved living conditions for the population and cultural development”. The 2017–2023 contracts primarily consisted of investments; the sectors receiving the most support were social housing (75 per cent funded by the States) and infrastructure (road and air transport and schools). The 2017–2023 contracts provided for programming totalling

944.4 million euros (112.7 billion CFP francs), of which the State financed 53 per cent, i.e. 501 million euros (59.8 billion CFP francs). Of that amount, 410.2 million euros (48.9 billion CFP francs) was for investments and 90.8 million euros (10.8 billion CFP francs) for operating costs.

(b) **The Special Investment Fund and the Equipment Grant for Rural Areas.** Between 2017 and 2023, the French State contributed 79.5 million euros (9.5 billion CFP francs) to the Special Investment Fund and the Equipment Grant.

Since 2017, the French State has provided:

(i) 45.7 million euros (5.5 billion CFP francs) to all 33 communes through the Equipment Grant for Rural Areas, which is intended to subsidize the capital expenditure of communes, but can also be used to finance the development of projects (project design and studies);

(ii) 33.8 million (4 billion CFP francs) for all local authorities in New Caledonia (33 communes, three provinces and New Caledonia) from the Special Investment Fund for investment in community facilities;

(c) **Tax relief.** Overseas tax assistance targets private sector economic projects. It allows a taxpayer based in metropolitan France to benefit from a significant tax reduction in return for investing in a productive project overseas. This reduces the cost of financing the project by approximately 30 per cent. The mechanism was extended until 2025, giving project owners greater visibility. Tax relief remains the main tool of State support for the private sector and all flagship projects in recent years have benefited from it. According to the administering Power, in 2021, the budgetary cost to the State for overseas tax assistance amounted to almost 88 million euros (10.5 billion CFP francs), compared with 105 million euros in 2020 (12.5 billion CFP francs) and 163.5 million euros in 2019 (19.5 billion CFP francs). The number of cases has increased, but the projects are smaller.

B. Mineral resources

35. According to the report of the Overseas Issuing Institute for 2021, New Caledonia, with 7 per cent of the world's nickel reserves, is the fifth-largest source of that metal in the world, after Australia (21 per cent), Indonesia (21 per cent), Brazil (16 per cent) and the Russian Federation (7 per cent). New Caledonia has jurisdiction over nickel, chromium and hydrocarbons with regard to the regulation and enforcement of rights, including export licences. Mining is carried out by about ten operators. There are three metallurgical nickel ore processing plants in the Territory, and the main operators are Société Le Nickel (SLN), Nickel Mining Company, Prony Resources New Caledonia and Koniambo Nickel. According to the administering Power, the three plants suffer from both current world market conditions characterized by excess supply and conditions specific to the Territory (such as high production costs, difficulties in mastering the industrial process and problems of access to mining resources). The level of nickel ore exports has risen sharply in recent years, from 5.5 million tons in 2015 to 7.94 million tons in 2021. Metallurgical production, which had seen a steady increase between 2015 and 2018, from 93,977 tons to 114,637 tons, has since been steadily declining, reaching 73,413 tons in 2021 (a decrease of 19 per cent). The sector has a strong knock-on effect in terms of induced employment and consumption, which feed the other sectors of the economy. According to an April 2021 study by the New Caledonian Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, the sector directly employs 9 per cent of private sector employees (approximately 6,000 people) and generates nearly a quarter of direct, indirect or induced wage employment.

C. Construction and manufacturing

36. According to the administering Power, in 2021 the construction and public works sector accounted for an average of 9 per cent of the wealth generated and employed some 9 per cent of wage earners in the Territory. As at 31 December 2022, the sector had 6,777 businesses, accounting for 10.7 per cent of all New Caledonian businesses (compared with 11.3 per cent in 2021).

D. Agriculture and fisheries

37. Although the primary sector (excluding mining) accounted for around 2 per cent of wealth generation in 2021 and 2.6 per cent of wage employment (with 1,762 wage earners in 2022), it is nonetheless the principal sector of activity of much of the rural population. However, the last general census of agriculture dates back to 2012. New Caledonia is not self-sufficient in most agricultural and livestock sectors and thus remains heavily dependent on imports. The agricultural sector includes a food-crop farming component not included in accounting statistics, but whose production level is estimated to be equal to that of the business sector. According to the administering Power, longline production increased to 2,805 tons in 2022. Tuna accounted for 90 per cent of the volume fished. The main outlet for high-seas fishing is the local market, which absorbs more than 80 per cent of production.

E. Transport and communications

38. Since 2000, New Caledonia has had authority over international traffic rights and air carrier operational programmes. Powers in policing and security in respect of air traffic were transferred, for domestic traffic only, in 2013. The New Caledonia Air Services Agency, a public enterprise of New Caledonia, is responsible for ensuring the continuity of air services. To that end, it owns 99.38 per cent of the shares in the international airline Aircalin.

39. The four international airlines that operated regular flights from and to the Territory prior to the suspension of international commercial passenger transport owing to the health crisis gradually resumed service in 2022. Regular international flights connected Nouméa-La Tontouta airport to neighbouring countries and territories (Australia, New Zealand, Vanuatu and Fiji) as well as Japan. In July 2022, Aircalin began operating direct services to Singapore, diversifying its Asian routes and offering shorter connections to Paris than via Japan. Over 2022, a total of 323,319 international passengers passed through La Tontouta airport, compared to 567,016 passengers in 2019.

40. The year 2023 saw the consolidation of international services, with the reopening of all routes served before the pandemic (reopening of Melbourne) and the development of new services, including an increase in service to French Polynesia. However, the number of passengers carried is not expected to return to 2019 levels until 2024. In the first 11 months of 2023, 438,800 passengers were transported.

41. Regarding domestic service, New Caledonia has 14 airfields open to public air traffic. Public domestic air transport is provided by three companies (Air Calédonie, Air Loyauté and Air Alizé), the main one being Air Calédonie. The new Lifou-Wanaham airport and the extension to the parking lot were commissioned on 27 October 2022, while construction continues on a new cargo building, scheduled for completion at the end of 2024. These projects, costing over 14.2 million euros (1.7 billion CFP francs), are financed partly by the State, which is contributing 5.3 million euros (625 million CFP francs). The new airport makes it possible to

receive up to 300,000 passengers and 750 tons of cargo annually. Domestic transit was less affected than international traffic by the COVID-19 health crisis, serving about 20 per cent fewer passengers in 2022 than in 2019. Traffic recorded in 2023 should still be lower than in 2022. The arrival of a company dedicated to freight transport or transport on demand is scheduled for late 2024.

42. The telecommunications sector includes the territorial operator, the Post and Telecommunications Office of New Caledonia, and its partners. Since 2008, New Caledonia has been connected to the Internet by an undersea optical cable that links Nouméa to Sydney. The number of subscribers is increasing and had reached 67,173 by 31 December 2022 (+6 per cent since 2021). A programme to secure the transmission networks, which is being carried out by the Post and Telecommunications Office with the support of the Government of New Caledonia, aims to improve the resilience of the domestic network, both land and sea, and of international links. It includes the deployment of a second international undersea cable to Fiji in August 2022 to secure international connectivity for New Caledonia for the next 25 years. The cable was financed with a loan from the French Development Agency, assistance from the Special Investment Fund and national tax exemptions (Ministry of the Interior and Overseas Territories).

F. Tourism

43. In the view of the administering Power, New Caledonia, with its geographical location and cultural richness, has real strengths and considerable tourism potential that has not yet been fully tapped. Tourism could, therefore, be a driver of the Territory's economic development. In March 2018, the Government of New Caledonia, as part of its economic diversification strategy and in order to support tourism, which is the second largest export sector after nickel, approved a strategy for the period up to 2025 aimed at developing services and leisure activities for tourists. New Caledonia aims to welcome more than 200,000 tourists and 1.2 million cruise passengers (goals set prior to the health crisis).

44. In 2019, the tourism sector accounted for just over 2.8 per cent of GDP and 5,387 jobs. That year, the sector attracted a record 130,458 visitors. From March 2020 to 1 December 2021, the health crisis and border closures led to an exceptional 76.1 per cent drop in tourist numbers in New Caledonia. Tourism picked up again in 2022, without returning to its pre-crisis level (the number of travellers increased sixfold between 2021 and 2022). In 2022, 78,848 tourists visited New Caledonia, the majority from mainland France (41 per cent of arrivals), Australia (24 per cent) and New Zealand (9 per cent). Cruise ship arrivals began again in October 2022, but only 23 ships docked with 60,371 cruise passengers on board in 2022 (compared with 149 ships with 343,962 cruise passengers in 2019).

IV. Social conditions

A. General

45. The population of New Caledonia was estimated to be 268,500 as at 1 January 2023. The population of the Territory has fallen slightly since the last census, in 2019 (271,290 inhabitants). The trend has reversed in the space of a decade. The rate of population change, which was +8.8 per cent for the period between the 2009 and 2014 censuses, and then +1 per cent between 2014 and 2019, has since been negative (-0.5 per cent in 2022). The outflow of migrants (an estimated 10,000 departures between 2014

and 2019, a trend that has continued since then) is no longer offset by positive natural population change because of the continuous decline in fertility.

46. According to the Overseas Issuing Institute report for 2022, the Territory's human development index rose by 15 per cent between 1990 and 2010, driven by its social component (education and health), which accounted for 80 per cent of that increase.

47. The adult literacy rate is over 96 per cent and school enrolment (all levels) stands at 89 per cent. New Caledonians' level of education is gradually improving. In 2022, the baccalaureate pass rate was down 4.6 points (to 81 per cent), returning to its 2020 level after an exceptional year in 2021, marked by the lockdowns.

48. The concept of economic rebalancing is rooted in the Nouméa Accord and in the aim of achieving a more harmonious distribution of job and wealth creation throughout New Caledonia in preparation for the Territory's potential accession to full sovereignty. This concept led to the development of a formula for budgetary allocations that proactively favours the North (31.3 per cent) and Loyalty Islands (16 per cent) Provinces on account of their demographic weight and the imbalances to be corrected (for more details, see [A/AC.109/2019/11](#), para. 40). It has also resulted in the development of the Voh-Koné-Pouembout area in the North Province, with two successive development contracts (2011–2016 and 2017–2022), and the establishment of a nickel plant in the Province (Koniombo Nickel, in partnership with Glencore).

49. In the South Province, the administering Power has supported the construction of the Goro metallurgical plant, operated by the Prony Resources New Caledonia consortium since April 2021. According to the administering Power, the consortium consists of Société de participation minière du Sud calédonien (30 per cent of the shares), the trader Trafigura (19 per cent of the shares), Compagnie financière de Prony (30 per cent of the shares) and a trust company that is expected to hold 21 per cent of the shares. Once incorporated, employee ownership would take 12 per cent of the shares and a local fund, the Environmental and Sociocultural Risk Prevention Fund, would take 9 per cent of the shares. The Goro plant uses a hydrometallurgical process, which makes it possible to exploit low-grade nickel ore.

B. Employment

50. The average number of employees reached a record high in 2022. It stands at 67,390, representing growth of 3.2 per cent compared with 2021. All sectors of activity saw an increase in the number of employees over the period, with the exception of agriculture, where employment levels remained stable. The 2019 census data show several characteristic changes in the labour market compared to previous censuses, including feminization (a seven-point narrower gap between men and women), ageing, tertiarization (three out of four jobs are in services) and increasing qualifications (31 per cent of workers have a higher education degree).

51. The unemployment rate as defined by the International Labour Office was 10.9 per cent in 2022, compared to 13.3 per cent in 2020, higher than in metropolitan France or French Polynesia (7.3 per cent and 9 per cent, respectively, in 2022). However, it remains much lower than the rate in the overseas territories. According to the New Caledonian Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, the proportion of precarious jobs (including fixed-term contracts, temporary work and apprenticeships) has risen over four years, from 17 to 21 per cent of total occupied jobs (compared with 11 per cent in France). Part-time work also increased over the period (+4,500 employees). The Loyalty Islands Province continues to lag far behind in labour market terms.

C. Education

52. According to the Overseas Issuing Institute, in 2022, New Caledonia's school population was composed of 67,516 students, of whom 5,829 were in higher education, 32,874 were in primary education, spread over 251 public and private schools, and 28,813 were in the 104 middle and high schools. Post-baccalaureate education is expanding to meet the needs of the Territory. According to 2019 census data, the number of highly educated individuals has increased more than fourfold since 1996 and continues to grow rapidly, with a 39 per cent increase between 2014 and 2019. The number of graduates with a bachelor's degree or higher is also three times higher than in 1996. Over the same period, the number of individuals over 15 years of age with few or no degrees has decreased (by 8 per cent between 1996 and 2019), with 46,762 persons without a degree in 2019.

53. The "Cadres Avenir" (Future managers) scheme is a management training programme implemented by the administering Power as part of the rebalancing provided for in the Nouméa Accord. According to the administering Power, 2,088 training courses have been established since the launch of the programme in 12 December 2023, allowing the 1,948 beneficiaries to provide their expertise to various communities, administrations and companies in New Caledonia today. Some 64 per cent of those trainees are of Kanak origin. The overall success rate is 81 per cent, and 93 per cent of trainees successfully enter the workforce within three months of their return to New Caledonia. In 2023, the administering Power contributed 5.15 million euros (615 million CFP francs) to the programme, with New Caledonia contributing approximately 419,000 euros (50 million CFP francs). Since 2014, new measures have been taken under this specialization scheme to enable New Caledonians to take competitive examinations for the State's senior civil service.

54. The adapted military service is a mechanism that fosters the social and vocational integration of young people in difficult circumstances. It is aimed at people aged 18 to 25 in the overseas territories who suffer the most from unemployment and are often marginalized. In 2023, adapted military service volunteers represented 12 per cent of those aged 18 to 25 in New Caledonia. The average age of the trainees was 21 years old, 44 per cent were women and the illiteracy rate was 44 per cent. The employment rate among volunteers was 80 per cent in 2022. Three professional integration measures have been put in place to meet training needs and promote access to employment. The first scheme, called "Young trainees for development", which is specific to New Caledonia and is aimed at unemployed young people aged 18 to 26 in difficult circumstances, is intended to facilitate their integration by offering them training, an introduction to the world of work and the opportunity to participate in social life. The second programme, universal national service, is available to young people between the ages of 15 and 17 after the fourth year of high school. Its first phase, the cohesion stay, took place in 2020 (from 12 to 23 October), and 80 students, 40 girls and 40 boys in the fifth year of high school throughout the country (including 5 from the Wallis and Futuna Islands), were able to take part. That roll-out was subject to prior consultation with the local government and the three provinces in order to organize the terms of its implementation in the Territory. Lastly, civic service volunteering, a multifaceted civic engagement scheme, is supported by the administering Power, which has been focused on its development since 2011. This has included the development of voluntary public service for young people between the ages of 16 and 25, regardless of their qualifications, and for young people with disabilities up to 30 years of age. Civic service volunteers have served public authorities and associations in fields as diverse as culture, youth, the status of women and combating violence against women. In 2021, there were 550 young volunteers, 61 per cent of whom were women. These programmes were being maintained in 2023.

55. The University of New Caledonia is a public scientific, cultural and professional institution under the supervision of the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research. The University derives special institutional legitimacy from the Nouméa Accord, in which it is called on to address the specific research and training needs of New Caledonia (point 4.1.1). In addition to its main campus in Nouméa, the University opened a campus in the North Province in 2020, is a partner of the connected campus in Wallis and Futuna, and is planning to set up in Lifou as part of a partnership with the Loyalty Islands Province.

D. Health

56. The Territory has three public hospitals: Gaston-Bourret Territorial Hospital in the South Province; Albert-Bousquet Specialized Hospital in Nouméa, in the South Province; and North Hospital in the North Province.

57. In the area of health crisis management, competencies relating to health and civil security have been transferred by France, which nevertheless remains the guarantor of civil liberties. Since 2020, the COVID-19 health crisis has thus been managed in close cooperation between the administering Power and the political and customary authorities of New Caledonia. In the face of this crisis, which made it necessary to restrict public freedoms and put in place emergency health measures, it was agreed that the President of the Government of New Caledonia and the High Commissioner of the Republic would jointly decide how to proceed. State services, including the Armed Forces, also provided human, logistical and material support to New Caledonia from the start of the pandemic. Following the rapid implementation of strict sanitary protection and health and public freedom management measures, the Territory remained free of COVID-19 cases for a long time. The vaccination of the population started on 20 January 2021, with the provision of vaccines by the administering Power (in total, more than 400,000 doses were delivered to the Territory).

58. On 6 September 2021, three isolated cases of the Delta variant were identified in New Caledonia. In less than a week, hospitals had to deal with a massive influx of patients. A support mission from the Ministry of Health visited the Territory from 14 to 20 September to assess the quantity and quality of human and material reinforcements needed. More than 400 medical personnel were sent to augment the Territory's existing personnel. The Government of France also provided medical supplies, tests and personal protective equipment in large quantities. A military resuscitation unit (medical equipment and 39 military personnel) was also made available to the Territory. These reinforcements, the strict containment measures and the vaccination policy limited the impact of the spread of the Delta variant. After a peak around 20 September 2021, the number of cases began to decline, and the situation stabilized. As at December 2021, the Government of New Caledonia estimates that there are approximately 12,000 patients who have recovered and fewer than 300 deaths. An initial analysis showed that 45 per cent of all patients and 53 per cent of those who died were men. Of those with confirmed cases, 70 per cent were not vaccinated, and of those who died, more than 80 per cent were not vaccinated. While the epidemic has continued beyond 2021, its characteristics have changed profoundly: the number of people who have recovered is now over 74,000 and deaths have become rare, with 15 deaths reported in 2022. At the same time, the rate of vaccination has fallen.

V. Environment

59. The administering Power indicates that New Caledonia has a unique natural heritage. Its land is characterized by a particularly high rate of endemism (76 per cent for plant species) and the existence of various ecosystems (rainforest, maquis shrubland), some of which, such as dry forest, are particularly endangered. The Territory is also rich in marine biodiversity and possesses a vast maritime area. The various threats to this biodiversity (which include mining, invasive exotic species, fires and climate change) have attracted the special attention of those responsible for environmental management (the North, South and Loyalty Islands Provinces and the Government of New Caledonia) and research institutes, which receive technical and financial support from the State. Alongside these public actors, non-governmental organizations and nature protection associations are also very active and involved in the field.

VI. Relations with international organizations and partners

60. Organic Act No. 99-209 governs the legal framework for the establishment of external relations by New Caledonia. New Caledonia has been an associate member of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific since 1992. It became an associate member of the Pacific Islands Forum in 2006 and a full member in 2016. The participation of New Caledonia for the first time as a full member in the Forum summit in Apia in 2017 was an important step in the implementation of the Nouméa Accord towards a greater international presence.

61. New Caledonia is also a full member of the Pacific Community, which has its secretariat in Nouméa. Other regional arrangements to which New Caledonia is a full party include the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, the Oceania Customs Organization and the Pacific Tourism Organisation. It participates under different statutes in the work of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (as an associate member), the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (as a participating territory), the Pacific Islands Development Forum (participating in the work, without any special status), the World Health Organization (with a non-voting seat on the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific) and the Oceania Regional Anti-Doping Organization (as a participating member). Lastly, New Caledonia, with the support of the Government of France, was granted associate membership in the International Organization of la Francophonie in 2016 and in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 2017.

62. New Caledonia has continued to strengthen its ties with the European Union, with which it holds the status of associated overseas territory, as conferred by the Treaty of Rome. The European Commission office for the Pacific overseas countries and territories is based in Nouméa. Under the eleventh European Development Fund, New Caledonia received 29.8 million euros (3.6 billion CFP francs) between 2017 and 2020. Over this period, New Caledonia, together with the other three overseas countries and territories in the Pacific, benefited from a regional envelope under the eleventh European Development Fund amounting to 36 million euros for the implementation of a regional cooperation project. Lastly, New Caledonia is also involved in the work of the Association of the Overseas Countries and Territories of the European Union, of which it assumed the vice-presidency in 2019 and the presidency in December 2020.

63. In January 2012, the French Minister for Cooperation, the French Minister for Overseas Territories and the President of the Government of New Caledonia signed an agreement on the hosting of representatives of New Caledonia in French

diplomatic and consular missions in the Pacific (Oceania). The first New Caledonia representative was appointed to work out of the French Embassy in Wellington in 2012. On 9 March 2017, the Congress of New Caledonia adopted, by a majority, a country law on New Caledonia representatives that allows the Territory to be represented in States or territories in the Pacific. Five delegates took up their posts in 2019 and 2020 in the French embassies in Australia, Fiji, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand.

64. Since 2016, the Government of New Caledonia has been heavily invested in developing relations with neighbouring States. In addition to the tripartite cooperation agreement initiated in 2012 between France, New Caledonia and Vanuatu, and regularly renewed since then, New Caledonia has strengthened its cooperation with Vanuatu by signing a joint cooperation plan in 2017. New Caledonia signed similar cooperation plans with New Zealand in 2016 and Papua New Guinea in 2018. It has also entered into an agreement on the development of economic and commercial exchanges with Vanuatu and is in discussions with other States in the region. The Government of New Caledonia intends to develop its economic diplomacy in the region. As such, economic diplomacy missions were sent to Papua New Guinea in July 2018, Fiji in July 2019 and Australia in March 2020.

VII. Position of the administering Power

65. Speaking on the question of New Caledonia during the general debate of the Fourth Committee on 9 October 2023, the representative of France recalled his country's unprecedented cooperation with the United Nations, including over the past two years through dialogue at the ministerial level with the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, through requests for the deployment of electoral experts and through the organization of a visit by the Special Committee to New Caledonia in 2018.

66. The representative of France recalled that three referendums had been held, all of which had concluded with New Caledonia remaining part of the French Republic. Political dialogue had resumed, and discussions concerning the political and institutional organization of New Caledonia were under way. An audit of the decolonization process had been carried out within that framework.

67. At the institutional level, the President of the Republic has first proposed building a pathway for the future that would preserve the gains of the Nouméa process, namely, self-determination, local institutions, citizenship and devolution of power. It should also provide for change, particularly with regard to the unfreezing of the electoral roll.

VIII. Consideration of the question by the United Nations

A. Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

68. The Special Committee considered the question of New Caledonia at its 4th and 10th meetings held, respectively, on 12 and 23 June 2023. At the 4th meeting, the representatives of France and Papua New Guinea each made a statement. At the same meeting, the Special Committee, having granted the requests for hearing made at its 3rd meeting held on 13 June, heard statements by Philippe Gomes of the Calédonie-

Ensemble political group, represented in the Congress of New Caledonia, Magalie Tingal of the Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste, Laura Vendegou of the Rassemblement-Les Républicains group, and Gil Brial of the Mouvement populaire calédonien.

69. At its 10th meeting, the Special Committee adopted, without a vote, the draft resolution on the question of New Caledonia ([A/AC.109/2022/L.22](#)) submitted by the representatives of Fiji and Papua New Guinea.

B. Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

70. At its 9th meeting held on 11 October 2023, the Fourth Committee adopted, without a vote, draft resolution XII on the question of New Caledonia (see [A/C.4/78/SR.9](#)).

C. Action taken by the General Assembly

71. On 7 December 2023, the General Assembly adopted resolution [78/94](#) without a vote, on the basis of the report of the Special Committee transmitted to the Assembly ([A/78/23](#)) and its subsequent consideration by the Fourth Committee.

Map of New Caledonia

