



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

General recommendation No. 40 (2024) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems

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I. A road map to fifty-fifty parity

1. Women have the right to equal and inclusive representation in all decision-making systems on equal terms with men. Despite significant progress by States parties, this right is still not respected, which also seriously hampers the implementation of all other rights under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Furthermore, the failure to ensure the equal and inclusive sharing of decision-making power between women and men prevents States and the international community from effectively addressing urgent local, national, regional and global challenges. As noted in the preamble of the Convention, the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields. To respond to these challenges for current and future generations, the present general recommendation contains an outline of a road map towards women's full enjoyment of their right to equal and inclusive representation in all decision-making systems.

2. In the present general recommendation, the Committee provides comprehensive guidance for States parties on achieving the equal and inclusive representation of women in all decision-making systems across all sectors, aiming for a systemic change. It outlines legislative, policy and programmatic measures to ensure the implementation of this obligation and overcome global challenges. It defines "equal and inclusive representation" as fifty-fifty parity between women and men in all their diversity in terms of equal access to and equal power within decision-making systems, hereinafter also referred to simply as "parity". It defines "decision-making systems" as encompassing decision-making that takes place through formal and informal processes in all sectors, including in political, public, economic and digital spaces. Achieving parity therefore requires considering multiple arenas of decision-making and how they interact, and dismantling all obstacles that prevent women from accessing decision-making systems on an equal footing with men.

3. The present general recommendation furthermore incorporates young people and future generations into a vision of society rooted in peace and parity. As outlined in the present general recommendation, there is a key convergence between the expectations and rights of young people and the building of a parity-based system.

II. Equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems as a game-changing solution

4. The Committee observes that a growing number of disruptive and urgent challenges, including those related to peace, political stability, economic development, climate change, technological advancements, such as artificial intelligence, and the transformation and sustainability of the multilateral system and governance, directly affect the implementation of the Convention and are increasingly transforming societies. Their complexity requires the building of collective intelligence by placing parity at the core of decision-making. A "surge in parity", as it has been described by the Secretary-General,¹ is key to joint decision-making and to the innovative solutions needed to build resilient societies.

¹ United Nations, "Secretary-General's remarks to High-level event on Women in Power", 12 March 2019, available at www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2019-03-12/secretary-generals-remarks-high-level-event-women-power-delivered.

A. Peace and political stability

5. Despite the escalation of conflicts and crises and women being key driving forces of sustainable peace,² women remain structurally and significantly underrepresented in conflict and crisis prevention and peace negotiations and peacebuilding efforts. Between 1992 and 2019, women represented only 13 per cent of negotiators, 6 per cent of mediators and 6 per cent of signatories in peace processes.³ In 2022, women participated as negotiators or delegates on behalf of parties to conflict in 4 of the 5 active peace processes led or co-led by the United Nations. Proportionally, their level of representation stood only at 16 per cent, however, a further drop compared with 19 per cent in 2021 and 23 per cent in 2020.⁴ In 2023, none of the peace agreements reached included representatives of women's groups as signatories.⁵ Women comprise only one third of participants in international forums debating such critical issues as the threat posed by nuclear weapons, increasing military expenditure, the proliferation of arms and ammunition and the weaponization of new technologies.⁶

6. Disinformation and polarization threaten to exacerbate conflicts. Although women's leadership in political decision-making leads to greater stability and peace, stronger responsiveness to people's needs and enhanced cooperation,⁷ women's political representation and civic space are increasingly under attack through restrictions on the activities of women's organizations, growing attacks on and intimidation of women politicians, journalists and human rights defenders, and challenges to and reversals of generational gains made in relation to women's and girls' human rights.

B. Sustainable, inclusive and human rights-based economy

7. The economic autonomy of women is key for accessing their rights and the pathway to inclusive economic growth,⁸ poverty eradication, social justice and sustainable development.⁹ It is a key step towards a human rights-based economy. However, the overrepresentation of women in many informal, low-paying, less innovative and economically less lucrative sectors largely excludes them from decision-making positions and shaping the economy. They are underrepresented in decision-making in the economic governance architecture, multilateral financial institutions, debt servicing systems, capital markets, the industrial infrastructure architecture, trade negotiations and public procurement regimes. For example, women-owned businesses are awarded only 1 per cent of government contracts in the

² United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), "Women's participation and a better understanding of the political" in *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325* (2015), available at <https://wps.unwomen.org/participation/>; The Pact for the Future, General Assembly resolution 79/1, para. 40; and UN-Women, "Facts and figures: women, peace, and security", 18 October 2024, available at www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures.

³ United Nations, "Inclusive diplomacy", available at www.un.org/en/observances/women-in-diplomacy-day.

⁴ S/2023/725, para. 9.

⁵ University of Edinburgh, PA-X Peace Agreement Database, version 7 (plus AgtID 2467), 2023, available at <https://pax.peaceagreements.org/>.

⁶ UN-Women, "Facts and figures: women, peace, and security".

⁷ Minna Cowper-Coles, *Women Political Leaders: The Impact of Gender on Democracy*, (London, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2021).

⁸ UN-Women, "Facts and figures: economic empowerment", February 2024, available at www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures.

⁹ UN-Women, "Facts and figures: economic empowerment".

public procurement market,¹⁰ and women comprised only 17.7 per cent of inventors named in patent applications in 2023.¹¹ Women occupy only 28.2 per cent of management positions in the labour market,¹² and a survey of 185 central banks showed that only 16 per cent were led by women.¹³ In 2019, only 2 per cent of venture capital was directed towards start-ups founded by women.¹⁴ The growing importance of the digital economy and the continuing gender digital gap risk exacerbating this situation and creating new forms of systemic discrimination.

C. Climate change and environmental disaster risk reduction

8. As highlighted in general recommendation No. 37 (2018) on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change, gender inequalities and intersecting forms of discrimination against women and girls are exacerbated by climate change and disasters, which heighten their exposure to resulting risks and losses. The critical role of women in disaster risk reduction is also highlighted in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. Research shows that countries with more women parliamentarians are more likely to adopt policies on climate change and land conservation and ratify environmental treaties.¹⁵ Similarly, having more women on corporate boards has been linked to energy efficiency improvements and a reduced environmental footprint.¹⁶ In agricultural regions, women’s traditional and Indigenous knowledge is key to adaptive practices in farming, climate change management and resource management.¹⁷ However, women, especially young women, who are leading climate and environmental activism,¹⁸ are largely excluded from decision-making. As at 2020, women held only 15 per cent of ministerial portfolios in the environmental sector.¹⁹ The representation of women on party delegations at the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change stood at 34 per cent, a proportion that has remained stagnant over the last 10 years.²⁰

¹⁰ International Trade Centre (ITC), “ITC-UN-Women: Global Campaign on Gender-Responsive Public Procurement”, available at www.intracen.org/news-and-events/campaigns/women-in-public-procurement.

¹¹ World Intellectual Property Organization, “Intellectual property, gender, and diversity”, available at www.wipo.int/web/gender.

¹² Taylor Hanna and others, “Forecasting women in leadership positions: technical brief”, (UN-Women), available at www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/forecasting-women-in-leadership-positions.pdf.

¹³ Official Monetary and Financial Institutions Forum, *Gender Balance Index 2024*.

¹⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *UNESCO Science Report: The Race against Time for Smarter Development* (Paris, 2021).

¹⁵ International Union for Conservation of Nature, “New data reveals slow progress in achieving gender equality in environmental decision making”, 1 March 2021.

¹⁶ Silvia Lesi, “Gender and climate action”, European Investment Bank, 28 July 2023.

¹⁷ General recommendation No. 37 (2018) on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change.

¹⁸ See also [A/HRC/50/25](http://www.unhcr.org/refugees-and-asylum-seekers/50/25).

¹⁹ International Union for Conservation of Nature, “New data reveals slow progress in achieving gender equality in environmental decision making”.

²⁰ WEDO, “Release: new data shows 34% women’s participation on party delegations at COP28, the same percentage as 10 years ago”, 24 January 2024. Available at <https://wedo.org/release-new-data-shows-34-womens-participation-on-party-delegations-at-cop28-the-same-percentage-as-10-years-ago/>.

D. Technological developments, including the rise of artificial intelligence

9. The rapidly evolving technological transition, propelled by the exponentially increasing importance of artificial intelligence as a core driver of the digital transformation, is changing the global community. This fifth industrial revolution has immense potential to benefit humanity if developed using an approach that is based on human rights, including women's rights, and accessibility for persons with disabilities. Diverse perspectives and collective intelligence are essential to achieve this. However, due to gender gaps in access to technologies, including digital literacy, and in studies, careers and leadership positions in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), women have been severely underrepresented in the development of these technological advances. For example, women make up only 29.2 per cent of all STEM workers, and roughly 30 per cent of the artificial intelligence workforce.²¹ They comprise only 18 per cent of graduates from doctoral programmes on artificial intelligence,²² and 13.83 per cent of artificial intelligence paper authors.²³ Only 12.4 per cent of women are C-Suite executives in STEM.²⁴ Artificial intelligence systems have also shown a tendency to reflect and magnify gender bias,²⁵ which manifests in discriminatory outputs, risking a rollback in gender equality gains and new forms of structural discrimination.

E. Transformation and sustainability of the multilateral system and governance

10. The disruptive challenges described above must be dealt with at the local, national, regional and international levels. The rules and platforms of multilateralism, the role of which has expanded significantly in recent decades, often maintain discrimination, including the underrepresentation of women, and often respond insufficiently to the complexity of current challenges. A parity-based system, resolutely geared towards the integration of young people and intergenerational leadership, is a condition for the effectiveness, sustainability, resilience, legitimacy and accountability of the multilateral system.

III. Seven pillars of equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems

11. Patriarchal structures impede the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems. Patriarchy is a system of power deeply embedded in political, social, economic and cultural structures. It creates a hierarchy, historically assigning distinct roles, worth and qualities to women and men. It results in a division of labour whereby women are primarily responsible for the private sphere of the home and family, while men are the main actors in the public sphere of politics and economy, based on differential weights assigned to efforts in the two domains. Patriarchy permeates all societies. At its most severe, it takes the form of an institutionalized

²¹ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2023* (Geneva, 2023).

²² Daniel Zhang and others, *Artificial Intelligence Index Report 2021* (Stanford, Stanford University, 2021).

²³ Gabriela Ramos, "Why we must act now to close the gender gap in AI", World Economic Forum, 22 August 2022.

²⁴ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2023*.

²⁵ UN-Women, "Artificial intelligence and gender equality", 22 May 2024, available at www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2024/05/artificial-intelligence-and-gender-equality.

regime of systematic oppression and domination of women, committed with the intention of maintaining a regime that is increasingly referred to as “gender apartheid”.²⁶It is therefore crucial to codify the crime of “gender apartheid” to create full accountability for gender-based crimes.

12. A transformative approach addressing patriarchy, as presented in the present general recommendation, is in line with article 5 (a) of the Convention,²⁷ which commits States parties to eliminating prejudices and practices that are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.

13. To this end, the Committee identifies seven pillars of equal and inclusive representation in decision-making systems: (a) fifty-fifty parity between women and men in decision-making systems as a starting point and universal norm; (b) effective youth leadership conditioned by parity; (c) intersectionality and the inclusion of women in all their diversity in decision-making systems; (d) a comprehensive approach to decision-making systems across spheres; (e) equal power and influence exercised by women in decision-making systems; (f) structural transformation for the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems; and (g) civil society representation in decision-making systems.

A. Fifty-fifty parity between women and men in decision-making systems as a starting point and universal norm

14. Targets of 30 per cent for the representation of women in decision-making are incompatible with the Convention’s core aim of elimination of discrimination against women, as they convey a message that inequality between women and men is justifiable. Decision-making will have real and dynamic meaning and lasting effect only when it is based on fifty-fifty parity and takes equal account of the interests of both women and men. The equal and inclusive representation of women is also an important driver of integrity, as it disrupts pre-established collusive networks.²⁸

15. As reflected in the concluding observations of the Committee, a growing number of States parties have passed or are considering parity laws for elections and other decision-making roles. Parity means the full and equal sharing of power on a fifty-fifty basis between women and men as a permanent and core feature of all areas, including political, public and economic life. Legislation guaranteeing parity is thus not intended to be removed once women’s historical disadvantages have been redressed but remains as a legal principle and permanent and universal feature of good governance. References to parity in the present general recommendation are always in relation to fifty-fifty parity between women and men in all their diversity.

²⁶ In article 7 (1) (h) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, persecution against any identifiable group or collectivity on gender grounds is identified as an act that constitutes a crime against humanity. There is a growing call, including among human rights mechanisms of the Human Rights Council and civil society, for the codification of the crime of gender apartheid under international law, including in the definition of apartheid in article 2 (2) (h) of the Proposed International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes Against Humanity.

²⁷ Unless otherwise indicated, articles refer to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

²⁸ See also United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *The Time is Now: Addressing the Gender Dimensions of Corruption* (Vienna, 2020).

B. Effective youth leadership conditioned by parity

16. Young people have proven to be vital stakeholders in contributing to human rights, sustainable development and peace and security, and the importance of their representation in decision-making has been underlined by States.²⁹ Young people are recognized as critical agents of positive change, fulfilling their own potential and ensuring a world fit for future generations in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Pact for the Future. However, gender inequality between girls and boys, young women and young men compromises their role in constructing a better world. Furthermore, existing approaches to youth engagement often view young people as a homogeneous group, reinforcing social norms and structures that perpetuate inequality. A transformative approach to young people's engagement is required to reach parity in decision-making for current and future generations. Parity is essential to ensure that young people can build a peaceful, equal, inclusive and sustainable world that responds to their demands, implements their rights, ensures youth co-leadership and intergenerational solidarity, and enables them to anticipate and overcome crises.

C. Intersectionality and the inclusion of women in all their diversity in decision-making systems

17. Under the Convention, States parties must address discrimination against women that intersects with other forms of discrimination, including newly emerging forms of discrimination. In its general recommendation No. 28 (2010) on the core obligations of States parties under article 2 of the Convention, the Committee clarifies that intersectionality is a basic concept for understanding the scope of States parties' obligations, a concept further clarified in general recommendation No. 33 (2015) on women's access to justice and No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19. The Committee consistently issues recommendations to address intersecting and evolving forms of discrimination, including in relation to decision-making roles, and has also issued general recommendations No. 18 (1991) on disabled women, No. 27 (2010) on older women and the protection of their human rights, No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women and No. 39 (2022) on the rights of Indigenous women and girls, in all of which it calls for equal and inclusive decision-making. To ensure truly inclusive decision-making systems, women in all their diversity, with particular attention to young people as guarantors of the sustainability of parity, need to be the leading forces in legislation, strategies, policies and programmes aimed at realizing this right.

D. A comprehensive approach to decision-making systems across spheres

18. Decision-making spans various interconnected spheres. In its general recommendation No. 23 (1997) on women in political and public life, the Committee clarifies that States parties' obligations under article 7 cover all areas of political and public life. Article 8 further guarantees women's rights to represent their governments at the international level and participate in the work of international organizations. A joint reading of articles 7 and 8, alongside articles 5 and 9–16 elucidate an expansive approach to women's representation in all decision-making systems. This aligns with

²⁹ The Pact for the Future, General Assembly resolution [79/1](#); Human Rights Council resolutions [32/1](#), [35/14](#), [41/13](#) and [51/17](#); Security Council resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#); and General Assembly resolution [76/137](#).

articles 1 and 3, recognizing the interrelated nature of women's rights across all fields of life. The Committee also highlights the need for the equal and inclusive representation of women in all emerging fields, including artificial intelligence.

E. Equal power and influence exercised by women in decision-making systems

19. The Convention stipulates that women enjoy equal rights with men. In its general recommendation No. 23 (1997), the Committee stresses that a tokenistic approach is unacceptable – women must be involved equally in decision-making at all levels. However, patriarchal norms often limit women's opportunities to accede to senior levels of decision-making, where they could drive and influence agendas. The distribution of decision-making roles also often reflects patterns of gender segregation: the allocation of ministerial portfolios, for example, tends to be based on assumptions about stereotyped male and female responsibilities. Equal and inclusive representation in decision-making means that all roles are accessible to women and men at all levels. It also means revaluing and prioritizing issues, as well as ensuring parity across issues.

F. Structural transformation for the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems

20. The preamble and articles 5 and 11 (2) (c) stipulate that changing stereotyped gender roles in society and the family, as well as a reclassification of work is needed to achieve full equality. In its general recommendation No. 23 (1997), the Committee elaborates how domestic work and care obligations, women's economic dependence on men and long and inflexible working hours constitute obstacles to women's equal and inclusive access to decision-making. Changing these norms and stereotypes requires the structural transformation of gendered roles and responsibilities across the public and private spheres, fostering a context in which women and men can equally integrate professional duties and competencies and family and other care responsibilities, including through a new organization of work and a reconfiguration of the concepts of productivity, monetization and the care economy.

G. Civil society representation in decision-making systems

21. The representation of women in civil society is essential for integrating a gender perspective in decision-making and for advising States in the development of gender-responsive legislation and policies. In particular, the role of women's rights organizations and women human rights defenders must be seen as equally important as that of other civil society organizations, and parity must also be achieved in civil society organizations. To create more inclusive forms of governance, States should open pathways and remove any obstacles, reverse the increasing closing of civic space, ensure rights protection and provide financial support and capacity-building to women's and girls' organizations and women human rights defenders, so that they can participate substantively in all fields of decision-making, including but also going beyond issues that are narrowly perceived as "women's issues". Support should also be provided to other civil society organizations to establish a parity-based system, to see it as their role and to develop their capacity to work towards parity.

IV. Normative framework for the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems

22. Under international human rights treaty law, women are guaranteed the right to equal and inclusive representation in decision-making systems. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women affirms women's equal right to participate in political and public life, including international decision-making and decision-making related to peace and security, as well as their equal rights to participate in decision-making in the economic sector. The Convention on the Political Rights of Women grants women equal rights to vote, run for office and hold public positions without discrimination.³⁰ Under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, women and men have equal civil and political rights, including in relation to decision-making in the political and public spheres.³¹ The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also stipulates the equal right of men and women to enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights, thereby also including decision-making in these spheres.³² Regional conventions, including the American Convention on Human Rights, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Protocol thereto on the Rights of Women in Africa, the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights), the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence³³ ensure similar protections. Reflecting an intersectional approach, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes that women with disabilities face multiple forms of discrimination and stipulates that States parties must ensure that all persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in the conduct of public affairs.³⁴ The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination prohibits racial discrimination across all political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.³⁵

23. The four United Nations World Conferences on Women, held in Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995), have shaped women's roles as equal actors in decision-making. In the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the participation of women in power and decision-making is identified among the strategic objectives. Governments are called upon to remove all obstacles to women's full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making, so that power and responsibility are shared between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities.³⁶ In its resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) and its subsequent resolutions, the Security Council urges States to ensure the equal representation of women at all decision-making in conflict prevention, management and resolution. Sustainable Development Goal targets 5.5

³⁰ Convention on the Political Rights of Women, arts. 1–3.

³¹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, arts. 1 (1) and 3.

³² International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, art. 3.

³³ European Convention on Human Rights, art. 14; American Convention on Human Rights, arts. 1 and 23; Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, arts. 4 and 5; African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, arts. 2 and 13; Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, art. 9; Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, arts. 21, 23, 39, and 40; and Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, preamble and arts. 1 and 6.

³⁴ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, arts. 6 and 29.

³⁵ International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, art. 5.

³⁶ Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, paras. 1, 190 and 192.

and 16.7 are aimed at women's full participation and leadership in political, economic and public decision-making, and progress towards those targets is tracked using representative metrics based on gender, age, disability and population group.³⁷ In the agreed conclusions adopted at its sixty-fifth session, the Commission on the Status of Women urged that action be taken to achieve the goal of fifty-fifty gender balance at all levels of elected positions.³⁸ Under action 8 of the Pact for the Future, States have undertaken to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.³⁹ In action 19, it is recognized that the full, equal, safe and meaningful participation of women in decision-making at all levels of peace and security is essential to achieve sustainable peace.⁴⁰ In the Kigali Declaration, adopted at the 145th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, parliaments committed to achieving parity in political decision-making.

V. Obligations of States parties in relation to the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems

A. General obligations to achieve the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems

1. Ensuring non-discrimination and substantive equality

24. The principles of non-discrimination and substantive equality are affirmed in articles 1 to 4. Non-discrimination is defined in article 1, while the obligations of legislative and other measures to achieve non-discrimination and substantive equality in all areas are enshrined in articles 2 and 3. Under article 4, it is established that temporary special measures to accelerate substantive equality shall not be considered a form of discrimination. In its general recommendation No. 25 (2004) on temporary special measures, the Committee explains that, under the non-discrimination obligation, States parties are required to ensure that there is no direct or indirect discrimination in their laws and that women are protected against discrimination in both the public and private spheres. In its general recommendation No. 28 (2010), the Committee clarifies that it is necessary to assess the *de jure* and *de facto* situation of women and implement policies for substantive equality, grounded in constitutional and legislative guarantees and supported by action plans.

25. In order to achieve substantive equality, in its general recommendation No. 5 (1988) on temporary special measures, the Committee urges States parties to use temporary special measures, such as positive action, preferential treatment or quota systems. Further examples of temporary special measures are specified in general recommendation No. 25. While temporary special measures are sometimes misunderstood to conflict with constitutional equality or merit-based systems, in general recommendation No. 25 (2004), the Committee clarifies that the non-identical treatment of women and men is sometimes necessary to address socially and culturally constructed inequalities that hamper a true merit-based system. The Committee underlines the need to establish a strong legal framework, including targeted permanent and temporary special measures, to prevent and address discrimination and ensure substantive equality in order to reach fifty-fifty parity in

³⁷ See https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16#targets_and_indicators.

³⁸ E/2021/27, chap. I.A.

³⁹ General Assembly resolution 79/1, para. 27 (b).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 40.

decision-making systems within a clear time frame. Such a legal framework is currently insufficient or lacks implementation or institutionalization.

26. The Committee recommends that States parties:

(a) Ensure the full implementation of the Convention, including by abolishing all discriminatory legislative provisions and ensuring equality before the law, including in the Constitution, repealing all reservations to the Convention, adopting legislation and other measures for substantive equality in all fields, including all newly emerging fields and technologies, and harmonizing customary law with the Convention;

(b) Amend the constitution and legislative frameworks to institutionalize fifty-fifty parity between women and men in all spheres of decision-making;

(c) Adopt a parity strategy at the local, national, regional and international levels and corresponding national action plans on parity in all spheres and at all levels of decision-making, with a tangible objective of achieving parity by 2030, based on analysis and update of cross-cutting, comprehensive, disaggregated and cutting-edge data, monitoring progress and setbacks, and regularly publish those data and include them in regular reporting to the Committee;

(d) Promote support for and understanding of the non-discriminatory nature of temporary and permanent measures for parity through educational and awareness-raising measures on substantive equality;

(e) Ensure parity, transparency and integrity in nomination and selection processes for decision-making positions at the local, national, regional and international levels;

(f) Enforce parity requirements by establishing or strengthening monitoring bodies and stipulating penalties for non-compliance.

2. Intersectionality and diversity among women

27. In the Convention, it is recognized that women can face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, mentioning women in poverty (preamble), women of a particular marital status (articles 9, 11 and 16), pregnant women (articles 11 and 12) and rural women (article 14). By mentioning specific groups of women, it is made clear that, to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, States parties must also tackle all possible intersecting factors of discrimination. In various general recommendations and concluding observations, the Committee observes how discrimination against women interacts with other forms of discrimination, including that based on race, ethnicity, indigenous status, religion, belief, health, status, disability, age, class, caste, sexual orientation, gender identity, political opinion, national origin, marital and/or maternal status, socioeconomic status, and refugee, asylum-seeking, displaced or migratory status. That list is non-exhaustive and might vary across countries and over time and include newly emerging forms of discrimination, such as discrimination against climate refugees. The Committee has also specifically and constantly stressed the rights of women in all their diversity to participate in decision-making at all levels.

28. The Committee notes that women subjected to intersecting forms of discrimination will encounter additional barriers to access decision-making roles. It identifies a lack of statistical data on women in decision-making, disaggregated by other grounds of discrimination. The Committee stresses that all aspects of the present general recommendation should be interpreted within an intersectional framework.

29. **The Committee recommends that States parties:**

(a) **Adopt legislative and other measures, including awareness-raising and educational measures, to prevent and eradicate intersecting forms of discrimination and ensure substantive equality;**

(b) **Develop and integrate an intersectional gender perspective in all areas and at all levels of decision-making, based on the collection and analysis of intersectional data on women;**

(c) **Develop recruitment strategies to ensure equal access by women in all their diversity to public positions in all areas of decision-making and guide stakeholders in the private sector to equally adopt such recruitment strategies, for example, through legislation, awareness-raising about the mutually reinforcing relationship between diversity and integrity and the importance and success of diverse teams, and through financial and other incentives;**

(d) **Promote, using an intersectional lens, role models of women leaders.**

3. **Dismantling gender stereotypes**

30. Under article 5, States parties are required to eliminate all forms of gender stereotypes in all spheres.⁴¹ The Committee observes strong prevalence of gender stereotypes in all spheres of society, including their perpetuation and exacerbation through media portrayals of women reinforcing the dominant position of men. The rapidly emerging artificial intelligence sector, including generative artificial intelligence, computer vision systems, speech and audio artificial intelligence, robotics and control systems, specialized artificial intelligence systems and hybrid artificial intelligence systems, learns from frequently gender-biased training data, carrying gender-based discrimination from the analog into the digital world, and needs to be addressed urgently from a human rights, including women's rights, perspective. Furthermore, some misinterpretations of religion and culture can shape gender stereotypes. The Committee emphasizes that gender stereotypes constitute a key barrier to women's equal access to decision-making.

31. **The Committee recommends that States parties:**

(a) **Conduct awareness-raising campaigns for – and cooperate with – relevant stakeholders, including office holders, political parties, the public sector, media outlets, teachers, community, religious and faith-based leaders, members of electoral bodies, private sector representatives, trade unions, judiciary and law enforcement to adopt a positive discourse on parity, and enhance the understanding that the full participation of women in all areas of decision-making, on an equal basis with men, is essential for women to enjoy their human rights and benefits the entire community;**

(b) **Conduct corresponding awareness-raising campaigns as in subparagraph (a) addressed to the general public of all ages, aiming for women, girls, men and boys to become transformative agents of change for gender equality;**

(c) **Engage religious leaders and faith-based actors in the process of addressing areas of possible tensions between some interpretations of religious traditions and human rights, such as through the Faith for Rights framework of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights;**

⁴¹ In its forthcoming general recommendation No. 41, the Committee will specifically address gender stereotypes in various sectors, including in connection with the media, digitalization and artificial intelligence.

(d) Take immediate legislative and regulatory measures and adopt international and national frameworks to build a gender-equal and sustainable digital future, with parity and radical inclusion at its core. This includes parity in the development of non-biased, gender-sensitive and accessible artificial intelligence and the correction of biased artificial intelligence, through the application of interdisciplinary expertise on human rights, including women's rights, with corresponding continuous impact assessment from the outset and at every stage of development and dissemination to prevent biases, including training data bias, algorithmic bias and cognitive bias. It should also include the establishment of independent regulation mechanisms based on human rights, including women's rights, to audit the implementation of de-biasing;

(e) Adopt legislation and cooperate with media outlets to condemn, monitor and ensure accountability for sexism and misogyny, whether in public discourse or in mainstream or social media, to reach parity in editorial boards and media regulatory bodies and to enhance the capacity of media professionals and digital outlets to prevent the perpetuation of stereotypes about women in decision-making and ensure the equal visibility and valorization of women and their objective portrayal;

(f) Dismantle stereotypes and establish parity in sport and artistic expression regarding decision-making, funding and pay, as well as ensuring that women can perform in a safe and conducive environment;

(g) Establish or increase mentoring programmes, including intergenerational mentorship schemes, on political campaigning, leadership and negotiation for women and girls in all their diversity wishing to assume or already holding decision-making positions.

4. Representation of women in all their diversity on equal terms with men

32. The right of women to participate on equal terms with men in their countries' political, social, economic and cultural life is recognized in the preamble and articles 7 and 8 of the Convention. In its general recommendation No. 23 (1997), the Committee clarifies that equal sharing of decision-making power must avoid tokenism, whereby women are included but restricted to less influential roles or gain their position by virtue of connections to male relatives. It establishes that States parties have a responsibility to appoint women to senior decision-making roles. The Committee observes that women remain underrepresented in leadership positions at all levels and, when included, are often restricted to less influential roles or leadership roles in areas stereotypically associated with femaleness and stereotypically deemed less important.

33. **The Committee recommends that States parties:**

(a) **Structurally revise nomination, promotion and career management systems, introducing a parity requirement and gender rotation in leadership roles;**

(b) **Appoint women to senior roles in all areas of decision-making, preventing tokenism to ensure that women have full and equal power in these roles, and ensure equal opportunities for young persons;**

(c) **Establish collective channels for women's influence in all decision-making bodies, for example, by recognizing and providing adequate funding and logistical support to gender equality caucuses, sections and committees;**

(d) **Establish safeguards to prevent the influence of gender stereotypes when assigning decision-making roles to women and men;**

(e) **Adopt multipronged measures, including legal reforms, financial and other incentives for the private sector to appoint women to leadership positions, especially in non-stereotypical roles.**

5. Education towards empowerment and leadership

34. Equal access to all levels and aspects of education is enshrined in article 10 and further elaborated in general recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of girls and women to education. It is a key precondition for accessing decision-making systems on an equal footing with men and boys. However, the Committee observes that many women and girls still do not benefit from equal access to or participation in education, in law and in practice. The violation of this right is further exacerbated through intersectional discrimination, as seen, for example, against women and girls with disabilities. Even when equal access is granted, gender stereotypes are prevalent in the education system, including in teaching and learning materials, classroom practices, teacher training and biased attitudes towards girls and women both inside and outside the school environment, gearing them towards traditional fields of study and gendered behaviours. This not only keeps women out of certain disciplines that are critical to shaping the future, such as new technologies, including artificial intelligence, but also prevents them from envisioning themselves assuming a decision-making role. It is a key task of an education system to integrate an “education to empowerment”, ensuring that girls, boys, women and men are given the tools necessary to achieve parity and exercise leadership in an equal, responsible and ethical manner.

35. The Committee recommends that States parties:

(a) **Ensure parity in decision-making about the education system, relating to sector policies, plans, budgets and monitoring processes, and overcome gender segregation patterns within and across disciplines;**

(b) **Integrate women’s rights, women’s leadership and gender equality, and an understanding of and commitment to gender-transformative pedagogies into teacher training at all levels, including on eliminating gender stereotypes in teaching content and the classroom;**

(c) **Eliminate gender stereotypes in teaching and learning materials and integrate “unstereotyping” into learning materials, with a particular focus on early childhood education;**

(d) **Proactively promote gender equality at all education levels and in all subjects and fields, and include mandatory courses at all levels of the school curriculum on gender equality and the prevention and elimination of gender stereotypes;**

(e) **Integrate teaching about women’s rights, ethical leadership, integrity and civic skills into school curricula at all levels, sustaining the empowerment of all students;**

(f) **Ensure, including through awareness-raising and training, the full autonomy of women and girls in decision-making;**

(g) **Raise awareness of women role models in decision-making;**

(h) **Promote gender-transformative, safe and inclusive learning environments, including by integrating into curricula at all levels of education content on the ethical, safe and responsible use of digital technologies, with a strong gender lens, and on the prevention of and defence against online violence;**

(i) **Reach parity among university professors and introduce “women, law and leadership” as an academic discipline;**

(j) **Address, including through temporary special measures, gender and intersecting disparities in all education fields by ensuring that girls and women in all their diversity have the same opportunities as boys and men to access and benefit from quality education at all levels, in particular in higher education and disciplines serving as career paths to decision-making positions;**

(k) **Eliminate school dropout among girls by addressing its root causes, including poverty, school fees, child labour, child marriage and early pregnancy, and ensure a safe school environment and adequate sanitary facilities;**

(l) **Provide inclusive education for women and girls with disabilities at all levels of education and all sectors and combat all other forms of discrimination in the education system;**

(m) **Overcome the gender digital divide, including through access to free/affordable internet, integrating digital literacy at all levels of education, developing awareness-raising measures to dismantle attitudes preventing women’s access to internet and mobile devices, providing subsidies to facilitate women’s and girls’ access to mobile devices and data plans and offering access to lifelong learning on digital literacy;**

(n) **Ensure the radical inclusion of girls to reach parity in courses of study in fields traditionally associated with and dominated by men and boys, in particular in STEM, and eliminate cases of gender bias, job segregation and harassment in such fields, including by investing heavily in awareness-raising initiatives and career guidance to ensure an understanding in society that these fields are equally relevant to women and girls; integrating age-appropriate and accessible foundations and specialization possibilities in STEM in school curricula at all levels, including early childhood education; breaking disciplinary silos in STEM education; adopting temporary special measures to reach parity in STEM studies and careers, including financial subsidies to cover any extra costs of STEM education; and lifting mobility barriers and supporting young women’s employment and a dynamic pipeline, including through cooperation with the private sector, technical and vocational education and training and entrepreneurship in these fields.**

6. Freedom from gender-based violence against women and harassment

36. Gender-based violence against women is a form of discrimination directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately.⁴² It seriously inhibits women’s ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on equal basis with men. In its general recommendation No. 35 (2017), the Committee defines gender-based violence against women as taking multiple forms, including acts or omissions intended or likely to cause or result in death or physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, threats of such acts, harassment, coercion and arbitrary deprivation of liberty. Such violence may occur in all spheres of human interaction, whether public or private, including in the contexts of the family, the community, public spaces, the workplace, leisure, politics, sport, health services and educational settings. It can also occur online and in other digital environments and also takes the shape of structural, emotional and economic violence. It also often targets women human rights defenders, politicians, activists and journalists. The prohibition of gender-based violence against women has further evolved into a

⁴² General recommendation No. 19 (1992) on violence against women.

principle of customary international law, as illustrated in general recommendation No. 35 (2017).

37. The Committee observes that legislation addressing gender-based violence against women is often lacking, in whole or in part, and, where it does exist, it is often not fully implemented. Gender-based violence against women in the public and the private sphere prevents women from taking initial steps toward representation in decision-making. When exercised against women in decision-making roles, it may push them out and constitute a chilling effect discouraging other women from reaching for such positions. Legislation to specifically address gender-based violence against women in political and public life, including against women human rights defenders, politicians, activists, journalists and voters, is frequently lacking. The Committee highlights the role of media outlets and social media platforms in committing, perpetuating and normalizing gender-based violence against women, and the role of political parties in trivializing such violence, including sexual harassment and other misogynistic behaviour, within their ranks. It also recognizes that gender-based violence against women, including in decision-making, is often exacerbated for women who are subjected to intersectional discrimination.

38. The Committee stresses that gender-based violence against women, while discrimination itself, is the result of an unequal and discriminatory system, based on the structural domination and exclusion of women. While emphasizing the importance of adopting and implementing robust legislation to address gender-based violence against women, it also urges States parties to adopt a comprehensive approach and implement all rights under the Convention, including institutionalizing parity, as the key safeguard against gender-based violence against women.

39. **The Committee recommends that States parties:**

(a) **Adopt and enforce comprehensive legislation, including criminal legislation, and implement awareness-raising and educational measures, to prevent and eliminate all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls and provide all necessary services and access to justice for victims;**

(b) **Prevent, investigate, prosecute and punish all forms of gender-based violence against women, intimidation and hate speech in decision-making and against women candidates and office holders and combat the culture of silence and impunity;**

(c) **Introduce codes of conduct, with an intersectional perspective, in parliament, government, regional and local councils and political parties, public service and private sector companies to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence against women and hate speech, with independent complaint mechanisms and confidential counselling and provide corresponding training to all officials and staff;**

(d) **Provide effective redress and support services for women who are victims of gender-based violence in decision-making;**

(e) **Offer safety, security, cybersecurity and digital defence training for women in decision-making roles, including supporting peer groups for young women facing gender-based violence against women caused by power imbalances in the workplace;**

(f) **Ensure security at polling stations and during elections and prevent and punish election-related violence;**

(g) **Ensure that social media companies have systems, contextualized to the region and country where they are used, to respond immediately, effectively and efficiently to user- and artificial intelligence-generated content constituting**

online gender-based violence against women and harassment, and ensure accountability through the adoption and implementation of laws and international regulations with an approach based in human rights, in particular women's rights;

(h) **Collect and publish systematic disaggregated data on the extent, causes and effects of gender-based violence against women in decision-making, and on the effectiveness of prevention and response measures and tailor and improve systems and measures accordingly;**

(i) **Apply a strong intersectional perspective in all measures taken.**

7. Representation of women's rights organizations in decision-making

40. In its general recommendations No. 23 (1997), No. 30 (2013) on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations, No. 34 (2016), No. 37 (2018) and No. 39 (2022), the Committee calls upon States parties to ensure that civil society representatives are consulted and can actively shape policy formulation, implementation and monitoring in all areas and at all levels. Currently, spaces to consult with women's and girls' rights civil society organizations are limited and often not institutionalized, and consultation is frequently limited to issues narrowly perceived as "women's issues", rather than the full range of local, national, regional and international policy issues.

41. **The Committee recommends that States parties:**

(a) **Ensure safe and independent spaces for women's and girls' rights organizations, including youth-led and youth-focused organizations, and women human rights defenders to contribute directly and meaningfully to policymaking on all local, national, regional and international issues;**

(b) **Institutionalize safe and independent regular consultations with women's and girls' civil society organizations and women human rights defenders, including regarding new and/or growing challenges in relation to politics, security, the economy, technology, health and the environment;**

(c) **Provide access to independent capacity-building to expand the expertise of women's and girls' civil society organizations and women human rights defenders to participate in all decision-making areas, including those not narrowly perceived as "women's issues", and to expand expertise on women's rights of all other civil society organizations;**

(d) **Proactively ensure that women's civil society organizations and women human rights defenders representing women and girls who are subjected to intersectional discrimination can participate equally in such spaces and ensure the equal consideration of their perspectives.**

B. Specific obligations to achieve the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems

1. Parity in political and public decision-making

(a) Right to vote

42. Under article 7 (a), women are guaranteed the right to vote in all elections and referendums. However, despite legal reforms, women still face barriers to fully exercising this right. In its general recommendation No. 21 (1994) on equality in marriage and family relations, the Committee notes that nationality laws may deprive women of their right to vote based on family or marital status and, in its general recommendation No. 23 (1997), the Committee highlights obstacles, including

women's limited access to candidate information, voter registration challenges linked to caring responsibilities and financial constraints that limit their time to follow campaigns and turn out to vote, as well as stereotypes discouraging women from voting or leading to attempts by men to influence or control women's voting. Women may also face additional barriers to voting due to the lack of or control over necessary identification documents.

43. The Committee recommends that States parties:

(a) **Repeal discriminatory voting and nationality laws and ensure that women can exercise their right to vote on equal terms with men;**

(b) **Implement civic education campaigns including targeting youth, to promote voter registration, election knowledge, turnout at elections and combat stereotypes on women's roles in public life;**

(c) **Collect and publish disaggregated data on voting participation by women in marginalized situations in order to develop effective measures to boost their involvement;**

(d) **Facilitate voter registration and turnout for women by providing assistance in obtaining identification documents and ensure systematic birth registration of girls;**

(e) **Identify and eliminate other barriers to voter registration and participation in elections for women, including via extended voting hours, early voting periods, polling stations close to women's homes, free and accessible public transportation, and mail and remote voting technologies, as appropriate;**

(f) **Develop strategies for illiterate women to ensure that they can register and vote;**

(g) **Recognize the legal capacity of women with disabilities to vote and provide accessible polling stations and voting procedures with assistive tools, including Braille and sign language;**

(h) **Recruit women polling officers and, where appropriate, establish women-only polling stations to boost women's turnout;**

(i) **Ensure integrity and transparency of voting processes and combat corruption in electoral processes;**

(j) **Eliminate potential coercion of women voters by prohibiting family voting and ensuring women's rights to privacy in voting and secrecy of the ballot, including by ensuring their full control over both paper and digital forms of identification;**

(k) **Include the history of women's suffrage and of their right to stand for election in school curricula and in awareness-raising campaigns targeting the general public and office holders.**

(b) Right to stand for election

44. The right of women to stand for election to any public body is established in article 7 (a). The Committee observes, however, that the number of women candidates remains structurally limited and that women candidates remain subjected to significant discrimination in this area.

45. **The Committee recommends that States parties:**

(a) **Adopt or strengthen parity laws, for example, by alternating between women and men candidates in elections, via vertical and horizontal parity lists, and rejecting non-compliant lists;**

(b) **Conduct awareness-raising to reject excuses that not enough women are available or qualified to stand as candidates;**

(c) **Ensure the integrity of elections and combat all forms of corruption and abuse of power;**

(d) **Provide equitable financial and other support to women candidates, including spending caps and affordable advertising to ensure a level playing field in political campaigns;**

(e) **Align voting age and age of eligibility to stand for election in order to encourage more and younger women to participate;**

(f) **Recognize the legal capacity of women with disabilities to stand for election and provide reasonable accommodation.**

(c) **Right to participate in the formulation and implementation of government policy**

46. Women's right to participate in the formulation and implementation of government policy is guaranteed under article 7 (b). This includes the responsibilities of the parliament, local and regional councils and other community decision-making bodies. Under article 11, States parties are required to reconcile conflicts between work and family life, and, in general recommendation No. 25 (2004), the Committee recommends that laws, policies and programmes consider aspects of women's lives that may differ from those of men. Despite progress, women still hold only 27 per cent of seats in national parliaments⁴³ and constitute 35.5 per cent of elected members in local government.⁴⁴ They hold just 24.1 per cent of parliamentary speaker roles⁴⁵ and 18.9 per cent of chairs of parliamentary committees on defence, finance, foreign affairs and human rights.⁴⁶ They often account for less than 15 per cent of mayors and governors at the local and provincial levels. Few women serve as presidents and prime ministers, and only 23.3 per cent of cabinet ministers globally are women.⁴⁷

47. **The Committee recommends that States parties:**

(a) **Adopt parity laws for all elections and appointments;**

(b) **Adopt rules to ensure parity in leadership positions in parliaments, local and regional councils and other community decision-making bodies;**

(c) **Accommodate the family obligations of parliamentarians, government officials, local and regional council representatives and the staff of those office holders, including care-friendly working hours, childcare within the vicinity of the workplace, as well as proxy and remote voting possibilities;**

⁴³ Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Global and regional averages of women in national parliaments", Parline database, available at <https://data.ipu.org/women-averages> (accessed on 25 October 2024).

⁴⁴ UN-Women, "Facts and figures: women's leadership and political participation", 2 October 2024, available at www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures.

⁴⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Women speakers of national parliaments", Parline database, available at <https://data.ipu.org/women-speakers> (accessed on 25 October 2024).

⁴⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Women in parliament in 2023", available at www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2024-03/women-in-parliament-2023.

⁴⁷ UN-Women, "Facts and figures: women's leadership and political participation".

(d) **Commission gender audits of parliaments, government offices and local and regional councils assessing gender-responsiveness and parity in division of responsibilities, and accordingly mandate and tailor reforms to reach parity across all areas and levels of decision-making;**

(e) **Adopt legislation on paid parental leave for parliamentarians, government officials, local and regional council representatives and the staff of those office holders;**

(f) **Provide training on preventing and addressing implicit bias and stereotypes for parliamentarians, government officials, regional and local council representatives and the staff of those office holders;**

(g) **Establish gender equality mechanisms within decision-making bodies and provide training on gender analysis and integration for law makers and staff to ensure the formulation of gender-responsive legislation, public policies and budgeting.**

(d) Right to hold public office and to perform all public functions

48. Article 7 (b) stipulates women's rights to hold public office and perform all government functions, another area in which women remain underrepresented in leadership positions.

49. **The Committee recommends that States parties:**

(a) **Adopt laws and other measures to ensure parity in decision-making positions at all levels in public administration and the judiciary, including local, customary and informal justice systems, and include the capacity to eliminate gender stereotypes and conduct gender analysis and integration in training and exams for such appointments;**

(b) **Commission gender audits to assess gender-responsiveness and mandate gender equality reforms, including care-friendly working hours and flexible working arrangements, in public administration and the judiciary at all levels;**

(c) **Systematically integrate women's human rights, gender equality and the capacity to interpret the law from a gender perspective in initial training and recurrent capacity-building for judges, prosecutors, law professors and students, police and other law enforcement, and civil servants, in order to address gender bias and stereotyping and ensure gender-responsiveness in judicial and administrative decision-making.**

(e) Right to participate in non-governmental and public and political organizations

50. Under article 7 (c), women have the right to participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with public and political life. Further guidance in this regard is provided in general recommendations No. 23 (1997), No. 33 (2015) and No. 39 (2022). At present, provisions requiring that political parties, trade unions and professional associations ensure parity in their decision-making bodies are lacking or their implementation is limited. Representatives of civil society organizations and women human rights defenders are also frequently subjected to legal restrictions and to threats, attacks and reprisals.

51. **The Committee recommends that States parties:**

(a) **Create an institutionalized and enabling environment and regulatory framework for the free and independent establishment and operation of civil society organizations, including women's rights organizations;**

(b) **Ensure the personal safety of women representatives of civil society organizations and women human rights defenders, provide guarantees and legal protection to ensure that they can conduct their work free from gender-based violence against women, intimidation and reprisals, and ensure their access to justice;**

(c) **Encourage the adoption of parity rules for non-governmental and public and political organizations, including lobby organizations and think tanks;**

(d) **Mandate and enforce parity in decision-making bodies of political parties and trade unions, with penalties for non-compliance and incentives for compliance;**

(e) **Support the creation and strengthening of women's sections in political parties and trade unions, including through earmarked funds;**

(f) **Create participatory spaces for the input of young women, with a particular focus on groups in marginalized situations.**

2. Parity in international decision-making

52. The Committee highlights that, as critical decisions are increasingly made at the global level, international decision-making is an area in which parity needs to be pioneered and established.

(a) Right to represent governments at the international level

53. Under article 8, States parties are required to ensure that women have equal opportunities to represent their governments at the international level. Women served as 20.54 per cent of ambassadors in 2023.⁴⁸ At the United Nations, 39 per cent of heads and deputy heads of mission were women in 2023.⁴⁹ Women remain underrepresented in diplomatic and foreign services of most States parties, particularly in the highest ranks, and tend to be appointed as ambassadors in embassies considered less important for their country's foreign relations.

54. The Committee notes with appreciation that some States parties have adopted a feminist foreign policy, which seeks to advance gender equality and women's rights through foreign policy and multilateral engagement.

55. The Committee recommends that States parties:

(a) **Achieve and maintain parity in diplomatic and ambassadorial and consular appointments and the composition of all international delegations;**

(b) **Include the capacity to eliminate gender bias and stereotypes and to conduct gender analysis and integration in training and exams for diplomatic and ambassadorial appointments;**

(c) **Provide equal family and spousal benefits, including parental leave to women and men in the foreign service;**

(d) **Implement a feminist foreign policy, making gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment a central focus of government policy abroad, including by working towards parity in preventing conflict and violent extremism, ensuring women's equal economic rights and empowerment, protecting sexual and reproductive health and rights services, and establishing**

⁴⁸ Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy, Women in Diplomacy Dashboard, available at <https://womenindiplomacy.ae>.

⁴⁹ UN-Women, "Facts and figures: women, peace, and security".

new national and international partnerships on parity, including regarding development policies, debt and economic sanctions.

(b) Parity in the work of international organizations and negotiations

56. Article 8 stipulates equal opportunities for women to participate in the work of international organizations, which also includes universal and regional organizations. In its general recommendation No. 23 (1997), the Committee attributes the underrepresentation of women to the absence of objective criteria and processes for appointment and promotion to relevant positions. At present, concrete mechanisms to reach parity in the international arena are lacking.

57. The Committee recommends that States parties:

(a) Institutionalize parity laws and transparent procedures at the national level for nomination and selection for positions in international organizations, within and outside the United Nations system, including in regional organizations, at sessions of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in international and regional mechanisms, in international arbitration and financial institutions, including multilateral development banks, tribunals, quasi-judicial bodies, and in all delegations attending multilateral meetings, including the timely dissemination of information on vacancies, comprehensive job descriptions, the inclusion of gender parity as a criterion and merit-based selection procedures;

(b) Collect, monitor and publish disaggregated data on women's representation and seniority levels in international organizations.

3. Parity in peace and security decision-making

58. It is affirmed in the preamble that the cause of peace requires the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields. Building on the Convention, its general recommendation No. 30 (2013) and Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) and subsequent resolutions, the Committee emphasizes the essential character of parity in all sectors as a prerequisite for peace and security. Women, however, remain significantly underrepresented in all decision-making systems in relation to peace and security.

59. The Committee observes that the increasingly complex and changing nature of conflict, emerging security threats caused by new technologies, including cyberattacks and artificial intelligence-driven lethal autonomous weapon systems, which may also exacerbate existing power imbalances and biases, a climate emergency, pandemics, the increasing exploration of outer space and various shifts in the geopolitical landscape have created an urgent need for the expansion of the women and peace and security agenda to address newly emerging threats, including those going beyond armed conflict prevention. The women and peace and security agenda must be applied both domestically and internationally and both in armed conflict prevention and in building resilience to all impending and unanticipated crisis situations.

60. The Committee underlines that the degree of prioritization and implementation of women's rights in times of peace is intricately connected to their treatment in times of conflict. Domestic, foreign and transnational policies are also strongly interconnected and have cross-border and global impact on women's lives. It is therefore also essential to apply the women and peace and security agenda with a new interdisciplinary understanding of the interconnected nature of these dynamics and use it as tool to secure women's rights and a gender-responsive peace in all contexts, through both international development and domestic policies.

61. The Committee recommends that States parties:

(a) Adapt and extend the women and peace and security agenda to the changing nature of conflicts and new threats to peace and security, and apply the agenda holistically and as a women's human rights agenda in all decision-making and policymaking situations;

(b) Recognize women's crucial role as a driving force of sustainable peace in conflict prevention, management and resolution, and ensure parity in all aspects and at all stages and levels of decision-making on peace and security, including confidential meetings (so-called "back channel diplomacy"), always ensuring the full inclusion of women in marginalized situations, including women in poverty, refugee, asylum-seeking and displaced women and women with disabilities, as well as ensure the representation of women involved in track-two processes in formal peace processes;

(c) Ensure parity in the leadership, development, implementation and assessment of policies and programmes on overcoming the root causes of crises and conflicts, including anticipated and unanticipated threats, preventive diplomacy, security and defence and strategic sectors of conflict prevention;

(d) Ensure parity and the strict application of the women and peace and security approach in the regulation and implementation of arms control, including the non-proliferation of weapons and disarmament, including the urgent disarmament of all nuclear weapons,⁵⁰ and ensure parity and the strict application of the women and peace and security approach in the urgent conclusion of a legally binding instrument to prohibit lethal autonomous weapon systems that function without human control or oversight, and which cannot be used in compliance with international humanitarian law, and to regulate all other types of autonomous weapons systems;

(e) Ensure parity in leadership across all disciplines in crisis prevention in relation to health, the environment, the economy, space, cybersecurity, finance and technology, including all new frontiers of technology;

(f) Ensure parity in peace maintenance, peacebuilding and peacekeeping, including in formal and informal peace negotiations, mediation, transitional justice and rebuilding, intercommunity dialogues, and transitional decision-making bodies, including truth and reconciliation processes, national, international, regional and hybrid commissions, councils, monitoring bodies, verification mechanisms, and monitoring groups, election preparation and political processes, demobilization and reintegration programmes, security sector and judicial reforms and wider post-conflict reconstruction processes;

(g) Remove all obstacles to parity, including by ensuring childcare, security and flexibility in location, and provide active support, for example, by ensuring funding for the representation of women's rights civil society organizations;

(h) Expand early warning mechanisms for crisis and conflict from a gender perspective, including signs such as a decrease of women in leadership, a decrease of women in public spaces and spikes in hate speech and sexual violence;

(i) Ensure that the implementation of women's rights and parity is under no circumstances treated as subsidiary to other priorities;

⁵⁰ In the progress towards full equality, the Committee envisions the "general and complete disarmament, in particular nuclear disarmament under strict and effective international control" as enshrined in the preamble to the Convention and paragraph 28 of the Beijing Declaration.

(j) **Prioritize the design and implementation of women’s rights- and parity-based reparation programmes with a transformative impact in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes;**

(k) **Reframe national action plans on women and peace and security with parity as a fundamental principle, ensuring that they incorporate a feminist domestic and foreign policy, including a feminist approach to security, conflict prevention and peace, and are adapted to newly emerging threats, including those that go beyond the prevention of armed conflict and peacebuilding in the narrow sense; base national action plans on targeted indicators centred around the pillars of the extended women and peace and security agenda, as well as parity at all levels of local and national government and parliament, security and defence systems, innovative sectors and life sciences; consult with women’s rights civil society organizations in the development of national action plans, adequately fund national action plans and give them full efficacy at the national and international levels; and report on them and their implementation to the Committee in periodic reports;**

(l) **Apply an age-responsive approach to the design of policies on women and peace and security in order to account for the important role of young women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding and their specific needs, as recognized in Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) on youth and peace and security.**

4. Parity in economic decision-making

62. A joint reading of the obligation to eliminate discrimination and achieve substantive equality in articles 1–3 and women’s equal rights in decision-making enshrined in articles 7 and 8 with their specific rights in relation to education, employment and economic empowerment in line with articles 10, 11 and 13 provides for parity in economic decision-making. This is further underlined and explained in general recommendations No. 13 (1989) on equal remuneration for work of equal value, No. 16 (1991) on unpaid women workers in rural and urban family enterprises, No. 17 (1991) on the measurement and quantification of the unremunerated domestic activities of women and their recognition in the gross national product, No. 36 (2017) and No. 39 (2022).

63. The Committee acknowledges the positive steps by private sector and key economic institutions to implement the business and human rights frameworks but considers that the private sector has a specific responsibility to establish parity at all levels. Women’s autonomy and parity is the precondition for women to positively combine their productive outputs, professional career and their personal choices, including with regards to maternity. A more gender-balanced top management is also correlated with more robust anti-corruption measures and increased transparency, with clear benefits for private sector organizations.⁵¹

64. De jure and de facto discrimination and significant gaps in global and national economic frameworks and governance systems prevent women from being able to equally shape and access the economic market and assume decision-making roles therein. It also results in a failure to implement women’s economic rights and capture women’s productive outputs and contributions. Furthermore, unpaid care work, which is disproportionately carried out by women, constitutes a key factor that prevents

⁵¹ Scott Berinato, “Banks with more women on their boards commit less fraud”, Harvard Business Review, May–June 2021, available at <https://hbr.org/2021/05/banks-with-more-women-on-their-boards-commit-less-fraud>; and Kellie A. McElhaney and Sanaz Mobasseri, “Women create a sustainable future”, October 2012, available at www.eticanews.it/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Report-Women_Create_Sustainable_Value.pdf.

women from accessing economic opportunities on the same level as men and needs to be revalued and shared equally.

65. The Committee also identifies the digital economy, including the technological transition and development and the use of artificial intelligence, as a key field requiring the equal and inclusive representation of women. This is crucial to prevent the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and new forms of discrimination.

66. **The Committee recommends that States parties:**

(a) **Build an innovative framework at the local, national, regional and international levels, based on a sustainable, inclusive and human rights-based economy rooted in parity;**

(b) **Ensure women's full autonomy in economic decision-making, by ensuring equal rights and eliminating all forms of de jure and facto economic discrimination, including with regard to pay, taxation, economic and social models, regulations and practices that subordinate women as economic actors;**

(c) **Fully engage women in combating corruption and illicit financial flows;**

(d) **Ensure women's equal access to all resources, financial and non-financial, such as information and technological and energy resources, including reliable electricity and internet access, to equally participate in economic activities, access productive resources, shape economic models and exercise leadership;**

(e) **Ensure equal access for women-owned businesses to public and private sector procurement opportunities, including through permanent and temporary special measures, regulatory reforms and incentives;**

(f) **Adopt innovative measures to achieve parity in appointments to positions of economic responsibility, including boards of companies, and as chief executive officers of State-owned enterprises and private listed and unlisted companies;**

(g) **Adopt digital solutions, including e-governance and blockchain technology to strengthen integrity systems, tackling risks for abuse of power that infringe parity and other women's rights;**

(h) **Establish dialogue between companies and trade unions to institutionalize parity with clear targets and indicators, in company culture and procedures, including through promoting new models of work and economic leadership;**

(i) **Institutionalize workplace parity laws and policies and eradicate patterns of horizontal and vertical gender segregation at all levels of decision-making to complement, if necessary, agreements between companies and trade unions;**

(j) **Adopt laws and regulations that provide incentives for employers to formalize and support flexible working arrangements, while maintaining all labour rights and full social benefits coverage, for parents and other caregivers as part of a productivity index, and promote, including through awareness-raising measures and incentives, a parity-based company culture as a factor of sustainable development, guided by indicators that integrate social values and the Sustainable Development Goals, in addition to economic values, as a company target and objective of business success;**

(k) **Develop and encourage companies' participation in gender audits to assess their gender-sensitivity, gender-responsiveness and parity level in the**

division of responsibilities and company culture, providing incentives for good results, and request companies to report annually on measures to institutionalize parity;

(l) Set up a strategic action framework at the national and international levels to ensure the professional autonomy and leadership of women in the informal sector, including by increasing economic services and benefits, harnessing women's consumer power and improving tax incentives, ensure the provision of credit and social protection for women in the informal economy and support their transfer to the formal economy;

(m) Ensure parity in relation to decision-making on land use and redistribution, natural resources, and climate change mitigation and the "just transition";

(n) Take legislative measures, including temporary special measures, towards parity in the digital economy, and in the development and management of and decision-making on technological transition, including the development and dissemination of artificial intelligence products;

(o) Take proactive measures, including temporary special measures to ensure equal access to all innovative and cutting-edge sectors, patent applications and intellectual property and start-up opportunities, including in connection with the environment and space;

(p) Provide business, vocational and skills training, mentoring schemes, enterprise development programmes, internship and sponsorship programmes and support networks for girls and young women, with a special focus on young people in marginalized situations;

(q) Adopt legislation on paid parental leave for women and men, with the option to return to the same job and level of seniority, and invest in awareness-raising on the equal responsibility of women and men in child-raising and domestic responsibilities;

(r) Provide targeted support, including via temporary special measures, to single parents to follow careers in the private and public sectors;

(s) Invest in social infrastructure to allow women and men to participate in economic activities and share care and support responsibilities, including through the provision of free or affordable quality care for children, and invest in care and support systems, including home-based, that are gender-, age- and disability-responsive, based on a parity vision of society and on the recognition of the rights those providing and requiring care and support as well as of care as a universal societal need;

(t) Extend social protection to women performing domestic, agricultural and other unpaid work;

(u) Set up mechanisms for the recognition of the multisectoral skills and experience strengthened via the roles that parents perform during parental leave, when they return to the job market, and provide access to optional continuing training courses for parents during parental leave.

5. Women's rights in the private sphere as a precondition to access decision-making

67. Women's control over their own bodies and lives and their equal rights, including legal status and legal capacity in all spheres, including in the family and community sphere, are enshrined in the Convention and are fundamental to exercising

all their human rights, including their right to equal access to decision-making. The Committee observes that, despite progress, women's and girls' enjoyment of their rights in these areas often remains very limited. It also underlines, in its general recommendations No. 21 (1994) and No. 29 (2013) on the economic consequences of marriage, family relations and their dissolution, that unequal rights in family relations underlie all other aspects of discrimination against women.

68. The Committee recommends that States parties:

(a) **Ensure women's equal rights in marriage and family relations, including by repealing or amending personal status laws, including guardianship and legal capacity laws, that discriminate against women and girls;**

(b) **Prohibit forced marriage and child marriage, setting the minimum marriage age at 18 years for women and men, without exceptions;**

(c) **Provide free, inclusive, accessible, comprehensive and accurate information on healthcare to women, girls, men and boys, including the integration of age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights into school curricula;**

(d) **Ensure full access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services and remove legal and practical obstacles, including any denial of the legal capacity of women and girls, including women and girls with disabilities, to make healthcare decisions;**

(e) **Repeal discriminatory nationality laws affecting women;**

(f) **Ensure women's and girls' rights, on an equal basis with men and boys, to acquire, own, use and inherit property, in law and in practice;**

(g) **Conduct awareness-raising and educational campaigns, within and outside the school context, to build the understanding of women's and girls' right to take their own decisions in each aspect of their lives, of the need for equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men and women's equal rights in marriage and all family relations;**

(h) **Ensure adequate social benefits for single parents;**

(i) **Criminalize all harmful practices and all other forms of gender-based violence against women and girls, ensuring that there is zero tolerance for all forms of violence, including those often tolerated by cultural and social norms and practices.⁵²**

VI. Accountability and monitoring of State obligations to achieve parity-based systems

69. The Committee underlines the urgency of reaching parity in all decision-making systems to meet States parties' overdue obligations under international law as well as to collectively build equal, resilient and prosperous societies.

⁵² See also joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019) on harmful practices.

70. **The Committee recommends that States parties:**

(a) **Make an express commitment and mobilize the resources needed to achieve the obligations set out in the present general recommendation, and adopt national action plans on parity in all spheres of decision-making by 2030;**

(b) **Mobilize regional organizations in the implementation of the present general recommendation;**

(c) **Develop mechanisms to monitor and evaluate progress towards the implementation of the present general recommendation, including regular data collection and publication on the representation of women in all areas and at all levels of decision-making, disaggregated including by age, ethnic and socioeconomic background, and report those data widely, including to the Committee.**

VII. Actions for the international community to ensure parity-based systems

71. Building on existing commitments, the Committee sees several opportunities for action by the international community and regional organizations to advance the legal and normative basis for parity in decision-making in all spheres and at all levels.

72. **The Committee recommends that the international community:**

(a) **Fulfil the commitments under the Convention and the other human rights treaties on equality between women and men and the universality of rights;**

(b) **Anchor the principle of parity in decision-making, in all spheres and at all levels, in all future international frameworks and reform processes and in the application and interpretation of existing ones, including the Global Digital Compact;**

(c) **Adopt parity mechanisms for the membership of all United Nations bodies and mechanisms, including the main committees of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and expert bodies, including human rights treaty bodies and international tribunals, in appointments to independent working groups or as country or special rapporteurs, and in the leadership of multilateral institutions;**

(d) **Ensure parity in recruitment at all levels in international organizations;**

(e) **Implement innovative development policies and international cooperation in line with the aims of the present general recommendation, strengthening national capacities and civil society support;**

(f) **Integrate the framework outlined in the present general recommendation on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, including the extended approach to women and peace and security, into the agenda and future resolutions of the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and consider the establishment of new mechanisms on parity to further support international engagement.**