

Advanced unedited version

Distr.: General
23 October 2024

Original: English

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women****General recommendation No. 40 on equal and inclusive
representation of women in decision-making systems*****I. A roadmap to parity 50:50**

1. Women have the right to equal and inclusive representation in all decision-making systems on equal terms with men. Despite important progress by States parties, to date, this right is still not respected. This also seriously hampers implementation of all other rights under the CEDAW Convention. 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, this General Recommendation (GR) outlines a roadmap towards women's right to equal and inclusive representation.

2. This GR, provides comprehensive guidance for States parties on achieving 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. Drawing from the Convention, previous GRs, including GR No. 23, concluding observations, and other international and regional treaties and agreements, it clarifies the concept of equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems. It defines "equal and inclusive representation" as parity 50:50 between women and men in all their diversity in terms of equal access to and equal power within decision-making systems, referred to as parity in the text. It defines "decision-making systems" to encompass decision-making taking place in all sectors, in formal and informal processes, including the political, public, economic, and private spheres as well as the digital spaces. This comprehensive vision recognizes that parity cannot be achieved without considering multiple arenas of decision-making and how they shape and interact with one another, or without addressing all obstacles that prevent women from accessing decision-making systems on an equal footing with men.

3. This GR furthermore integrates youth and future generations into a vision of society rooted in peace and parity. As outlined in this GR, there is a key convergence between the expectations and rights of youth and the building of a parity system.

* Adopted by the Committee at its eighty-ninth session (7 - 25 October 2024).

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, such as those related to peace, political stability, economic development, climate change, technological advancements like artificial intelligence and the transformation and sustainability of the multilateral system and governance, not only directly affect the Convention's implementation but are also increasingly transforming societies. Their complexity requires building collective intelligence by placing parity at the core of decision-making on all matters. A "surge in parity" at all levels is key to joint decision-making and bringing about the innovative solutions needed to build resilient societies at the local, national, regional and international levels.

A. Peace and political stability

5. Despite the escalation of conflicts and crises worldwide and research demonstrating that women are key driving forces of sustainable peace,¹ for example increasing the likelihood and sustainability of peace agreements² and leading local peace efforts,³ women remain structurally and significantly underrepresented in conflict and crisis prevention as well as peace negotiations and peace-building efforts. Between 1992 and 2019, women represented only 13 percent of negotiators, 6 percent of mediators and 6 percent of signatories in peace processes.⁴ In 2022, the share of women as peace negotiators stood at a mere 16 percent, a decline from 23 percent in 2020, and only 33 percent of peace agreements included provisions on women or girls.⁵ In 2023, no peace agreement included representatives of women's groups as signatories.⁶ Women comprise only one third of participants in international fora debating critical issues, including threats of nuclear weapons, increasing military expenditures, the proliferation of arms and ammunition and the weaponization of new technologies.⁷

6. Disinformation and polarization further threaten to expand conflicts across all societies. Although women's leadership in political decision-making processes leads to greater stability and peace, stronger responsiveness to people's needs, and enhanced cooperation,⁸ women's political representation and civic space are increasingly under attack through restrictions on the activities of women's organizations, and the growing attacks and intimidations against women politicians, journalists, and human rights defenders, and challenges to and reversals of generational gains of women's and girls' human rights.

B. Sustainable, inclusive and human rights-based economy

7. Economic autonomy of women is key for accessing their rights and is the pathway to inclusive economic growth,⁹ poverty eradication, social justice and sustainable development.¹⁰ It is a key step towards building a human rights-based economy. However, women's overrepresentation in many informal as well as low-paying, less innovative and economically less lucrative sectors, including their systematic underrepresentation in STEM sectors,¹¹ largely excludes them from decision-making positions and shaping the economy. They are underrepresented, including in decision-making in economic governance architecture, multilateral financial institutions, debt servicing systems, capital markets, the

¹ <https://wps.unwomen.org/participation/>; United Nations Pact for the Future, Action 19, para. 40.

² <https://wps.unwomen.org/participation>.

³ Facts and figures: Women, peace, and security (unwomen.org).

⁴ Women in Diplomacy | United Nations.

⁵ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures>.

⁶ Facts and figures: Women, peace, and security (unwomen.org).

⁷ Facts and figures: Women, peace, and security (unwomen.org).

⁸ Women Political Leaders: The Impact of Gender on Democracy | Westminster Foundation for Democracy (wfd.org).

⁹ What we do: Economic empowerment | UN Women – Headquarters; Enhancing women's participation in economic development (worldbank.org).

¹⁰ Facts and figures: Economic empowerment | UN Women – Headquarters.

¹¹ Global Gender Gap Report of 2024.

industrial infrastructure architecture, trade negotiations and public procurement regimes. For example, women's owned businesses access only 1 percent of public procurement market¹² and only 17.7 percent of inventors named in patent applications were women in 2023.¹³ Women occupy only 28.2 percent of management positions in the labour market¹⁴, and a survey of 185 central banks showed that women lead only 16 percent of them.¹⁵ In 2019, venture capital for start-ups by women was at 2 percent only.¹⁶ The growing importance of the digital economy and the continuing gender digital gap risk exacerbating these and creating new systemic discrimination.

C. Climate change and environmental disaster risk reduction

8. As highlighted in GR No. 37, gender inequalities and intersecting forms of discrimination against women and girls are exacerbated through climate change and disasters. Pre-existing gender inequalities, including stereotyped gendered roles, also heighten their exposure to disaster-induced risks and losses. The Sendai Framework stresses that "Women and their participation are critical to effectively managing disaster risk and designing, resourcing and implementing gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction policies, plans and programmes".¹⁷ Indeed, an increase in the number of women members of Parliament has shown to boost the likelihood of adopting policies to combat climate change,¹⁸ ratifying environmental treaties, and promoting land conservation.¹⁹ Similarly, having more women on corporate boards has been linked to improvements in energy efficiency and a reduced environmental footprint.²⁰ In agricultural regions, women's traditional and indigenous knowledge is key to adaptive practices in farming, climate change and resource management.²¹ However, women, especially young women, who are leading frontline climate and environmental activism, are largely excluded from decision-making. As of 2020, women held only 15 percent of ministerial portfolios in the environmental sector.²² At the international level, women's representation on party delegations for COP 28 stood at 34 percent, a proportion that has remained stagnant over the last 10 years.²³

D. Technological developments, including the rise of Artificial Intelligence

9. The rapidly evolving technological transition, including the ever-faster expanding role of AI 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 and applied with an ethical and human rights including women's rights-based and accessible approach. Diverse perspectives and collective intelligence will be essential to achieve this. However, due to gender gaps in access to technologies, including digital literacy, and in representation in STEM studies and careers and leadership positions, women have been severely underrepresented in the development of these technological advances. For example, women make up only 29.2 percent of all STEM workers, and roughly 30 percent of AI workforce.²⁴ They comprise only 18 percent of AI researchers,²⁵ 13.83 percent of AI paper authors and 18

¹² ITC-UN Women: Global Campaign on Gender-Responsive Public Procurement | ITC (intracen.org).

¹³ Intellectual Property, Gender, and Diversity (wipo.int).

¹⁴ <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/forecasting-women-in-leadership-positions.pdf>.

¹⁵ Gender Balance Index 2024 - OMFIF.

¹⁶ UNESCO Science Report: the race against time for smarter development (2021).

¹⁷ General Assembly resolution 69/283, annex II, paras. 36 (a) (i) and 32, respectively.

¹⁸ "https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures" <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures>.

¹⁹ New data reveals slow progress in achieving gender equality in environmental decision making | IUCN.

²⁰ To fight climate change, more female leaders are fundamental (eib.org).

²¹ GR No. 37.

²² New data reveals slow progress in achieving gender equality in environmental decision making | IUCN.

²³ Release: New Data Shows 34% Women's Participation on Party Delegations at COP28, the same percentage as 10 years ago - WEDO

²⁴ Global Gender Gap Report of 2023.

²⁵ AI index 2021 report

percent of authors at the leading AI conferences.²⁶ Only 12.4 percent of women are C-Suite Executives in STEM.²⁷ AI systems, including their algorithms, have also shown a tendency to reflect and magnify gender bias²⁸ which manifests in discriminatory outputs, risking to roll back gains in gender equality and to lead to 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 local, national, regional and international levels; indeed, multilateralism has significantly expanded in the past decades. The rules and platforms of multilateralism still often maintain discrimination, including the underrepresentation of women, and, at the same time, often do not or insufficiently respond to the complexity of current challenges. A parity system, resolutely geared towards the integration of youth and intergenerational leaderships conditions 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 women's equal and inclusive representation in decision-making systems. Patriarchy is a system of power that is deeply embedded in existing 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 labor where 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 the economy, based on differential weights assigned to efforts in both domains. Patriarchy permeates all societies. In its most severe form, it takes the form of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination of women, committed with the intention of maintaining a regime that is increasingly referred to as 'gender apartheid'.²⁹ It 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 this GR, is in line with Article 5 (a) of the Convention³⁰, which commits States parties to eliminating prejudices and practices 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: (1) 50:50 parity between women and men as a starting point and universal norm; (2) Effective youth leadership conditioned by parity (3) Intersectionality and inclusion of women in all their diversity in decision-making systems; (4) A comprehensive approach to decision-making systems across spheres; (5) Women's equal power and influence in decision-making systems; (6) Structural transformation for equal and inclusive decision-making; (7) Civil society representation in decision-making systems.

A. 50:50 parity between women and men in decision-making systems as a starting point and universal norm

14. Targets of 30 percent representation of women in decision-making are incompatible with the Convention's core aim of elimination of discrimination against women, as these convey a message that inequality between women and men is justifiable. Decision-making

²⁶ Why we must act now to close the digital gender gap in AI | World Economic Forum (weforum.org).

²⁷ Global Gender Gap Report of 2023.

²⁸ Artificial Intelligence and gender equality | UN Women – Headquarters.

²⁹ The law as it stands in Article 7 (h) of the Rome Statute calls for gender persecution as an accountability crime for gender crimes. There is a growing call, including among human rights mechanisms of the HRC 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 Draft Crimes Against Humanity Convention.

³⁰ References to articles are articles of the CEDAW Convention, unless otherwise indicated.

will have real and dynamic meaning and lasting effect only when it is shared as 50:50 parity by women and men and takes equal account of the interests of both. Women's equal and inclusive representation is also an important driver of integrity, as it disrupts pre-established collusive networks.

15. Concluding observations by the Committee indicate that 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 50:50 sharing of power 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 this general recommendation are always in relation to 50:50 parity of women and men in all their diversity.

B. Young people's effective leadership conditioned by parity

16. Young people have proven vital stakeholders in contributing to peace and security, sustainable development, and human rights and States have underlined the importance of their representation in decision-making.³¹ Young people are also recognized as critical agents of positive change, fulfilling their own potential and ensuring a world fit for future generations in the 2030 Agenda and the Pact for the Future. However, gender inequality between girls and boys and young women and young men compromises their role in the construction of 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 effectively build a peaceful, equal, inclusive and sustainable world that responds to their demands, implements their rights, ensures youth co-leadership, intergenerational solidarity, and enables them to anticipate and overcome crises.

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

17. The Convention requests States parties to address discrimination against women that intersects with other forms of discrimination, which also encompass newly emerging forms of discrimination. In GR No. 28, the Committee clarifies that intersectionality is a basic concept for understanding the scope of States parties' obligations, a concept further clarified in GRs Nos. 33 and 35. The Committee consistently issues recommendations to address intersecting and evolving forms of discrimination, including in relation to decision-making roles, and has also issued GRs Nos. 18 on women with disabilities, 27 on older women, 34 on rural women, and 39 on indigenous women and girls, all of which call for equal and inclusive decision-making. To ensure truly inclusive decision-making systems, women in all their diversity, with particular attention to youth as guarantors of the sustainability of parity, need to be leading forces in the implementation of legislation, strategies, policies and programmes towards realizing this right.

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

18. Decision-making spans various interconnected spheres. GR No. 23 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, 9-16 elucidate an expansive approach to women's representation in all decision-making systems. This aligns with Articles 1 and 3, which recognize the interrelated nature of women's rights across all fields of life. The Committee also highlights the need for women's equal and inclusive representation in all emerging fields, including AI.

³¹ United Nations Pact for the Future; HRCRES 32/1 of 30 June 2016, 35/14 of 22 June 2017; 41/13 of 11 July 2019, and 51/17 of 6 October 2022 on youth and human rights; SCRES 2250 of 9 December 2015; GARES 76/137 of 16 December 2021.

E. Women's equal power and influence in decision-making systems

19. The Convention stipulates that women enjoy equal rights with men. GR No. 23 stresses that a tokenistic approach is unacceptable - women must be equally involved in decision-making at all levels. However, patriarchal norms often limit women's opportunities to accede to senior levels of decision-making where they would be able to drive and influence agendas. Distribution of decision-making roles also often reflects patterns of gender segregation. The allocation of ministerial portfolio, for example, tend to be based on assumptions about stereotyped male and female responsibilities. Equal and inclusive representation in decision-making means that all portfolios are accessible to women and men at all levels of representative government. It also means re-valuing and prioritizing issues, as well as ensuring parity across issue areas.

F. Structural transformation for 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. GR No. 23 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 where both women and men can equally integrate professional duties and competencies and family and other care obligations, including through a new organization of work, and a reconfiguration of the concepts of productivity, monetization and care economy.

G. Civil society representation in decision-making systems

21. The Committee views the representation of women in civil society, especially an equally important role of women's rights organizations and women human rights defenders with all other civil society organizations, as well as parity in these, as essential for integrating a gender perspective in decision-making processes and for advising States in the development of gender-responsive legislation and policies. 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 substantively participate in all fields of decision-making, including but also going beyond issues narrowly perceived as 'women's issues'. Support should also be provided to other organizations so that they integrate a parity system, and see it as their role and have the capacity to increase the representation and leadership of women.

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

22. International human rights treaty law guarantees women the right to equal and inclusive representation in decision-making systems. The CEDAW Convention 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 and private spheres. The Convention on the Political Rights of Women grants women equal rights to vote, run for office, and hold public positions without discrimination.³² Similarly, the ICCPR mandates equal civil and political rights, including those in relation to decision-making in the political and public spheres for women and men.³³ The ICESCR also stipulates the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights, thereby also including decision-making in these spheres.³⁴ Regional conventions, including the American

³² Convention on the Political Rights of Women, articles 1, 2, and 3.

³³ ICCPR, articles 1.1. and 3.

³⁴ ICESCR, article 3.

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 to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' on the Rights of Women in Africa, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, ensure similar protections and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.³⁵ Reflecting an intersectional approach, the CRPD 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.³⁶ The ICERD prohibits racial discrimination across all political, economic, social, and cultural rights.³⁷

23. The four UN World Conferences on Women in Mexico(1975), Copenhagen(1980), Nairobi(1985) and Beijing(1995) have shaped women's roles as equal actors in decision-making. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action identifies women in power and decision-making as one of twelve strategic objectives. It calls on governments 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.³⁸ UNSC Resolution 1325 and its subsequent resolutions urge States to ensure the equal representation of women at all decision-making levels in for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict. Targets 5.5 and 16.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals aim for women's full participation and leadership in political, economic, and public decision-making, tracking progress by representative metrics based on gender, age, disability, and population group.³⁹ The Agreed Conclusions of the 65th Commission on the Status of Women set the goal of achieving a 50:50 gender balance across all elected positions.⁴⁰ Action 8 (b) of the Pact for the Future, is about ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life. Action 19 (chapeau) recognizes that full, equal, safe and meaningful participation of women in decision-making at all levels of peace and security, is essential for achieving sustainable peace.⁴¹ In the Kigali Declaration adopted of 2022, IPU Parliaments committed to achieving parity in political decision-making.⁴²

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

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

A. Ensuring non-discrimination and substantive equality

24. Articles 1 to 4 affirm the principles of non-discrimination and substantive equality. Article 1 defines non-discrimination, while Articles 2 and 3 enshrine the obligations of legislative and other measures to achieve non-discrimination and substantive equality in all

³⁵ European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, article 14; American Convention on Human Rights, articles 1 and 23; Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, article 4 and 5; African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, articles 2 and 13, Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, article 9; Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, articles 21, 23, 39, and 40; Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence preamble, articles 1 and 6.

³⁶ CRPD, articles 6 and 29.

³⁷ ICERD, article 5.

³⁸ Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, para. 1, 190, and 192.

³⁹ https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16#targets_and_indicators.

⁴⁰ E/CN.6/2021/L.3, para. 61 (l).

⁴¹ https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sotf-pact_for_the_future_adopted.pdf.

⁴² Kigali Declaration, October 2022, 145th session of IPU.

areas. In addition, Article 4 establishes that temporary special measures to accelerate substantive equality shall not be considered a form of discrimination. GR No. 25 emphasizes that the principle of non-discrimination requires to ensure that their laws do not directly or indirectly discriminate and to protect women from discrimination in both public and private spheres. GR No. 28 further requires assessing the de jure and de facto situation of women and implement policies to achieve substantive equality, grounded in constitutional and legislative guarantees and supported by action plans.

25. To promote substantive equality, GR No. 5 urges States parties to use temporary special measures such as positive action, preferential treatment, or quotas. Further examples of temporary special measures are specified in GR No. 25. While temporary special measures are at times misunderstood to conflict with constitutional equality or merit-based systems, GR No. 25 clarifies that non-identical treatment of women and men is sometimes necessary to address socially and culturally constructed inequalities. The Committee underlines the need to establish a strong legal framework to prevent and address discrimination and ensure substantive equality, including targeted permanent and temporary special measures to reach 50:50 parity in decision-making systems within a clear timeframe. Such a legal framework is currently insufficiently existent, implemented and/or institutionalized.

26. The Committee recommends that States parties:

(a) **Ensure the implementation of all rights under the Convention, including by abolishing all discriminatory provisions in legislation and ensuring equality before the law, including in the Constitution, repealing all reservations to the Convention, adopting legislation and other measures towards reaching substantive equality in all fields, including all newly emerging fields and technologies, and harmonizing customary law with the Convention's provisions;**

(b) **Amend the Constitution and legislative frameworks to institutionalize 50:50 parity between women and men in all spheres of decision-making;**

(c) **Adopt a parity strategy at local, national, regional and international levels, and corresponding NAPs for parity in all spheres and levels of decision-making with a tangible objective of parity by 2030, based on the analysis and update of crosscutting, comprehensive, disaggregated and cutting-edge data, monitoring progress and setbacks, and publish such data on a regular basis and include it in regular reporting to the Committee;**

(d) **Promote support for and understanding of the non-discriminatory nature of temporary as well as permanent measures for parity through educational and awareness-raising measures;**

(e) **Ensure parity, transparency and integrity in nomination and selection processes for decision-making positions in all spheres of local, national, regional and international leadership;**

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

B. Intersectionality and diversity among women

27. The Convention recognizes 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, the Convention clarifies that to meet the obligation to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, States parties must also tackle all possible intersecting factors of discrimination. In various GRs and concluding observations the Committee observes how discrimination against women interacts with discrimination, including based on race, ethnicity, indigenous status, religion or belief, health, status, disability, age, class, caste, sexual orientation and gender identity, political opinion, national original, marital and/or maternal status, socioeconomic status, refugee, asylum-seeking, displaced and migratory status, a list which is non-exhaustive and might vary across countries and over time and include newly emerging forms of discrimination,

such as 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 who are subjected to intersecting forms of discrimination will encounter additional barriers to access decision-making roles. It identifies the lack of statistical data on women in decision-making, disaggregated by other grounds of discrimination. The Committee stresses that all aspects of the current GR should be interpreted within an intersectional framework.

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

(a) **Adopt legislative and other measures, including awareness- 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 levels of decision-making, based on the collection and analysis of intersectional data on women in all their diversity;**

(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 by legislation, raising awareness about the mutually reinforcing relation between diversity and integrity and the importance and success of diverse teams, and by creating financial and other incentives;**

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

C. Dismantling gender stereotypes

30. Article 5 requires States parties to eliminate all forms of gender stereotypes in all spheres.⁴³ The Committee observes a 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 AI sector, including Generative AI, Computer Vision Systems, Speech and Audio AI, Robotics and Control Systems, Specialized AI Systems and Hybrid AI Systems, learns from frequently gender-biased training data, carrying gender-based discrimination from the analogue into the digital world needs to be urgently addressed from a human rights including women's rights perspective. Furthermore, some misinterpretations of religion and culture can shape gender stereotypes. Thus 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 to enhance the understanding that the full participation of women in all areas of decision-making, on an equal basis with men, is essential for their enjoyment of their human rights and is to the benefit of the entire community;**

(b) **Conduct corresponding awareness-raising campaigns as in (a) addressed to the general public of all ages, aiming for both women and girls and 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 via the Faith for Rights framework of the OHCHR;**

⁴³ The forthcoming GR No. 41 will specifically address gender stereotypes, in various sectors, including in media, digitalization and AI.

(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 AI and the correction of biased AI, through the application of interdisciplinary expertise on human rights including women's rights with corresponding continuous impact assessment tools from the outset and at every stage of development and dissemination to prevent biases including training data bias, algorithmic bias and cognitive bias and ensuing discrimination. It should also include the establishment of independent human-rights, including women's rights-based regulation mechanisms 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 the mainstream media and 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 of women in decision-making and to ensure their equal visibility, valorization and objective portrayal;

(f) Dismantle stereotypes and establish parity in sport and artistic expression with regard to decision-making, funding and wage, as well as performance therein in a safe and conducive environment;

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

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

32. The Preamble of the Convention, along with Articles 7 and 8, guarantees women's equal right to participate in their countries' political, social, economic, and cultural life. GR 23 clarifies that the equal sharing of decision-making power avoids tokenism, whereby women are included but restricted to less influential roles to 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 women are included, they 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) Revise nomination, promotion and career management systems in a structural manner, including 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 also ensure equal opportunities for young generations;

(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 women's and gender equality caucuses, sections, and committees;

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

(e) Create incentives for the private sector to appoint women to leadership positions, especially in non-stereotypical and non-traditional roles, for example through legal reforms and financial incentives and other incentives.

E. Education towards empowerment and leadership

34. Equal access to all levels and aspects of education is enshrined in Article 10 and further elaborated in GR No. 36. 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 and participation in education, in law and in practice. This rights' violation is further exacerbated when subjected to intersectional discrimination, such as for 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 trainings 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 critical to shaping the future, such as new technologies, including AI, but also prevents envisioning themselves as assuming a decision-making role. The Committee considers that 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 necessary tools to implement parity and exercise leadership in an equal, responsible and ethical manner.

35. The Committee recommends that States parties:

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

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

(c) **Eliminate gender stereotypes in teaching and learning materials and integrate "unstereotyping" into learning materials with a particular attention to early childhood education, proactively promote gender equality at all levels of education 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;**

(d) **Integrate teaching about women's rights, ethical leadership and integrity and civic skills, into school curricula at all levels, sustaining the empowerment of boys and girls;**

(e) **Ensure, including through awareness-raising campaigns and trainings, women's and girls' full autonomy in choice and decision-making;**

(f) **Raise awareness of women role models in all areas of decision-making;**

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

(h) **Reach parity among university professors, and introduce "women, law and leadership" as an academic discipline;**

(i) **Address gender and intersecting disparities, including through temporary special measures in all fields of education by ensuring 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;**

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

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

(l) **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 that prevent women's access to**

internet and mobile devices, provide subsidies to facilitate women's and girls' access to mobile devices and data plans and offer access to lifelong learning on digital literacy;

(m) **Ensure radical inclusion of girls to reach parity in courses of study in fields traditionally associated with and dominated by men and boys, in particular STEM, 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; the integration of age-appropriate and accessible STEM foundations and specialization possibilities 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, lifting mobility barriers, supporting young women's employment and a dynamic pipeline including through cooperation with the private sector, TVET, and entrepreneurship in these fields, and eliminate cases of gender bias, job segregation and harassment therein.**

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

36. Gender-based violence against women (GBVAW) is a form of discrimination that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately.⁴⁴ It seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on the basis of equality with men. GR 35 defines GBVAW 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 human rights defenders, politicians, activists, and journalists. The prohibition of GBVAW has further evolved into a principle of customary international law, as illustrated in GR 35.

37. The Committee observes that legislation addressing GBVAW, or its implementation is often absent or remains insufficient. GBVAW in the public and the private sphere prevents women from being able to take initial steps toward participation in decision-making. When exercised against women in decision-making roles, it may push them out of these and constitute a chilling effect discouraging other women from reaching for such positions. There is also a frequent lack of legislation to specifically address GBVAW in political and public life, including human rights defenders, politicians, activists, journalists, and voters. The Committee highlights the role of media outlets and social media platforms in committing, perpetuating and normalizing GBVAW, and the role of political parties in trivializing GBVAW, including sexual harassment and other forms of misogynistic behaviour within their ranks. It also recognizes that GBVAW, including in decision-making is often exacerbated for women subjected to intersectional discrimination.

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

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

(a) **Adopt and enforce comprehensive legislation, including penal, 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;**

⁴⁴ GR 19.

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

(c) Create/strengthen independent and confidential complaint mechanisms for GBVAW in decision-making, providing these mechanisms with adequate training and funding;

(d) Introduce codes of conduct, with an intersectional perspective, in parliament, government, regional and local councils and political parties, to eliminate all forms of GBVAW and gendered hate speech, with independent complaint mechanisms and confidential counseling and provide corresponding training to all officials and staff;

(e) Provide effective redress and support services for GBVAW victims in decision-making;

(f) Offer safety, security, cybersecurity and digital defence training for women in decision-making roles, including supporting peer groups for young women facing GBVAW caused by power imbalances in the workplace;

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

(h) 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 AI-generated content constituting online GBVAW and harassment, and ensure accountability through adoption and implementation of laws and international regulations with a human rights-, in particular women's rights-based approach;

(i) Collect and publish systematic disaggregated data on the extent, causes, and effects of GBVAW in decision-making, and on the effectiveness of prevention and response measures and tailor and improve systems and measures accordingly;

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

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

40. GRs Nos. 23; 30, 34, 37, and 39 call on States parties to ensure that civil society representatives are consulted and can actively shape policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring in all areas at every level. Currently, spaces to consult with women's and girls' rights NGOs are few, often not institutionalized, and consultation is often 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 WHRDs to contribute directly and meaningfully to policy-making on local, national, regional and international issues;

(b) Institutionalize safe and independent regular consultations with women's and girls' NGOs and WHRDs, including in response to new and/or growing challenges in relation to politics, security, economy, technology, health and environment;

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

(d) Proactively ensure that women's NGOs and WHRDs representing women and girls' subjected to intersectional discrimination can equally participate in such spaces and ensure the equal consideration of their perspectives.

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

A. Parity in political and public decision-making

(1) The right to vote

42. Article 7 (a) guarantees women the right to vote in all elections and referenda. However, despite legal reforms, women still face barriers to fully exercising this right. GR No. 21 notes that nationality laws may deprive women of their right to vote based on family or marital status and GR No. 23 highlights obstacles including women's limited access to candidate information, voter registration challenges linked to caring responsibilities, financial constraints that limit their time to follow campaigns and turn out to vote and stereotypes that discourage women from voting or lead to attempts by men to influence or control women's voting. The Committee also notes that women may face additional barriers to voting due to the lack of or control over necessary ID.

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

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

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

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

(d) **Facilitate women's voter registration and turnout by assisting women with obtaining national ID, and ensure systematic birth registration of girls;**

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

(f) **Develop strategies for illiterate women to ensure 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 encourage women's turnout;**

(i) **Ensure the 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 and secrecy of their vote, including by ensuring women can maintain full control over both paper and digital ID;**

(k) **Include the history of women's suffrage, their right to vote and stand for election into school education and increase awareness including among the general public, and among office holders.**

(2) The right to stand for election

44. Article 7 (a) establishes women's right to stand for election to any public body. Despite an increase in the adoption of parity laws in national and local elections, the Committee observes that the number of women candidates remains structurally limited and that women candidates remain significantly subjected to discrimination in this area.

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

- (a) **Adopt and strengthen parity laws for example by alternating between women and men candidates in elections, via vertical and horizontal parity lists, rejecting non-compliant lists;**
- (b) **Conduct awareness-raising to reject excuses that insufficient women are available/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 for all elections, including spending caps and affordable advertising both on traditional and social media, to ensure an equal level playing field in political campaigns;**
- (e) **Align voting age and the age of eligibility to stand for election, as a means to encourage more and younger women to stand for election;**
- (f) **Recognize the legal capacity of women with disabilities to stand for election and provide reasonable accommodation.**

(3) The right to participate in the formulation and implementation of government policy

46. Article 7 (b) guarantees women's right to participate in the formulation and implementation of government policy. This includes the responsibilities of the parliament, local and regional councils and other community decision-making bodies. Article 11 requires States parties to reconcile conflicts between work and family life, and GR No. 25 recommends that laws, policies, and programs consider aspects of women's lives which may differ from those of men. Despite progress, women still hold only 27percent of seats in national parliaments⁴⁵ and 35.5percent of seats in local government.⁴⁶ They hold just 24.1percent of parliamentary speaker roles⁴⁷ and 18.9percent of chairs of parliamentary committees on defence, finance, foreign affairs and human rights.⁴⁸ They are often less than 15percent of mayors and governors at the local and provincial levels. Few women serve as presidents and prime ministers and only 22.3percent of cabinet ministers globally are women.⁴⁹

47. The Committee recommends that States parties:

- (a) **Adopt parity laws for elections and appointments;**
- (b) **Adopt rules to ensure parity in leadership positions in parliaments and local and regional councils as well as in other community decision-making bodies;**
- (c) **Accommodate family obligations of members of Parliament, government officials local and regional council official and their staff, including care-friendly working hours, childcare within office vicinity, as well as proxy and remote voting possibilities;**
- (d) **Commission gender audits of parliaments, government offices and local and regional councils assessing gender- responsiveness and parity in the division of responsibilities, and accordingly mandate and tailor reforms to reach parity across all areas and levels of decision-making;**
- (e) **Legislate paid parental leave for parliaments, governments, local and regional councils, for elected representatives and their staff;**
- (f) **Provide training, on preventing and addressing implicit bias and stereotypes to members of Parliaments, government officials, regional and local council representatives, and their staff;**

⁴⁵ <https://data.ipu.org/women-averages> (as of October 2024).

⁴⁶ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures> (data as of 1 January 2024).

⁴⁷ <https://data.ipu.org/women-speakers>.

⁴⁸ <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2024-03/women-in-parliament-2023>.

⁴⁹ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>.

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

(4) The 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 where 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 the judiciary, public administration including local, customary and informal justice systems, and include the capacity to eliminate gender stereotypes and conduct gender analysis and integration in the training and exams required 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 the judiciary and public administration at all levels;**

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

(5) The right to participate in non-governmental and public and political organizations

50. Article 7(c) asserts women's right to participate in NGOs and associations concerned with public and political life. GRs No. 23; 33 and 39 also provide further guidance in this regard. At present, there is limited existence/implementation of provisions requiring that political parties, trade unions, and professional associations ensure parity in their respective decision-making bodies. NGO representatives and WHRDs are also frequently subjected to legal restrictions in their work as well as to threats, attacks and reprisals.

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

(a) **Create an institutionalized and enabling environment and a regulatory framework for the free establishment and operation of women's rights NGOs;**

(b) **Ensure the personal safety of women representatives of NGOs and WHRDs, and provide guarantees and legal protection to ensure they can conduct their work without fear of GBVAW, 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 to provide a channel for the input of young women, with a particular focus on those from marginalized groups.**

B. Parity in international decision-making

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

(1) The right to represent governments at the international level

53. Article 8 requires States parties to ensure women equal opportunities to represent their governments at the international level. Globally, women served as 20.54percent of Ambassadors in 2023.⁵⁰ At the UN, 39percent of heads and deputy heads of mission were women as of 2023.⁵¹ Women remain underrepresented in the diplomatic and foreign services of most States parties, particularly in the highest ranks, and tend to be appointed as ambassadors in embassies that are 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 appointments;**

(b) **Ensure parity in the composition of all international delegations;**

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

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

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

(2) 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. GR No. 23 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 of the UN system, regional organizations, COPs, international and regional mechanisms, international arbitration and financial institutions, including multilateral development banks, tribunals, quasi-judicial bodies, and delegations with regards to all sectors, including 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.**

C. Parity in peace and security decision-making

58. The Preamble of the Convention affirms that the cause of peace requires the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields. Building on the Convention,

⁵⁰ <https://womenindiplomacy.ae>.

⁵¹ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures>.

GR No. 30, UNSC RES 1325 and its subsequent resolutions,⁵² the Committee emphasizes the essential character of parity in all sectors, in line with GR 40, 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 cyber-attacks and AI driven Legal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS), which also may exacerbate existing power imbalances and biases, a climate emergency, pandemics, increasing exploration of outer space, and various shifts in the geopolitical landscape have created an urgency for the expansion of the WPS agenda to newly emerging threats including those going beyond the prevention of armed conflict. The WPS 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 further 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 connected and have cross-border and global impact on the lives of women. It is therefore also essential to apply the WPS 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 as well as domestic policies.

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

(a) **Adapt and extend the WPS 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 and policy making 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, stages, and levels of decision-making on peace and security, including confidential meetings (so-called "back channel diplomacy"), the representation of women involved in Track Two Processes into formal peace processes, always ensuring the full inclusion of women in marginalized situations, including women in poverty, refugee, asylum-seeking, displaced women and women with disabilities;**

(c) **Ensure parity in leadership, development, implementation, and assessment of policies and programs on overcoming 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 WPS in regulation and implementation of arms control, including-proliferation of weapons and disarmament,⁵³ including the urgent disarmament of all nuclear weapons. Ensure parity and the strict application of WPS in the urgent conclusion of a legally binding instrument to prohibit lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS) 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 system's.**

(e) **Ensure gender parity in leadership across all disciplinary boundaries in crisis prevention in health, environment, economy, space, cyber security finance, 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, inter-community dialogues, and transitional decision-making bodies, including truth and reconciliation processes, national, international, regional, and**

⁵² UN SC resolution.

⁵³ In the progress toward full equality, the CEDAW Committee envisions the "*General and complete disarmament, in particular nuclear disarmament under strict and effective international control*" as enshrined in the Preamble to the CEDAW and Paragraph 28 of the Beijing Declaration.

hybrid commissions, councils, monitoring bodies, verification mechanisms, and monitoring groups, election preparation and political processes, demobilization and reintegration programs, security sector and judicial reforms, and wider post-conflict reconstruction processes;

(g) Remove all obstacles to parity, including by ensuring flexibility in location, childcare, and provision of security, and provide active support, such as through ensuring funding for women's NGO representation;

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

(j) Prioritize the design and implementation of women's rights and parity-based reparations programmes with transformative impact and DDR processes;

(k) Reframe NAPs on WPS with parity as a fundamental principle, a feminist domestic and foreign policy, including a feminist approach to security, conflict prevention and peace, and newly emerging threats including those going beyond the prevention of armed conflict and peace building in the narrow sense. Base NAPs on targeted indicators centred around the pillars of the extended WPS agenda, as well as parity at all levels of local and national government and parliament, security and defense systems, innovative sectors and life sciences. Consult with women's rights NGOs in the development of NAPs, adequately fund NAPs and give them full efficacy at the national and international levels; and report on them and their implementation to the CEDAW in periodic reporting;

(l) Design WPS policies with an age-responsive approach, that account for the important role of young women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding and their specific needs, as recognized in UNSC RES 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security.

D. Parity in economic decision-making

62. A joint reading of the obligation to eliminate discrimination and achieve substantive equality as enshrined in articles 1,2, and 3 with 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 via the Committee's GRs Nos. 36;16;17;13 and 39.

63. The Committee acknowledges the positive steps by the 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.⁵⁴

64. De jure and de facto discrimination and significant gaps in global and national economic frameworks and governance systems prevent women to equally shape and access the economic market and to 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 carework, which is disproportionately carried out by women, constitutes a key factor that prevents women from accessing economic opportunities on the same level as men and needs to be re-valued and shared equally.

⁵⁴ <https://hbr.org/2021/05/banks-with-more-women-on-their-boards-commit-less-fraud>;
https://www.eticanews.it/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Report-Women_Create_Sustainable_Value.pdf.

65. The Committee also identifies the digital economy, including the technological transition and development and use of AI and of algorithms as a key field requiring the full and equal participation of women. This is crucial to prevent the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and inventing of new forms of discrimination.

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

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

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

(c) **Fully engage women in the combat of corruption and of 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 the boards of companies, and as chief executive officers of State-owned enterprises and private listed and unlisted companies;**

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

(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 institute care- and support flexible working arrangements, while maintaining all labour rights and full social benefits coverage, for parents and other carers as a productivity index, and promote, including through awareness-raising measures and incentives, a company culture based on parity as a factor of sustainable development, guided by indicators that integrate social values and SDGs in addition to economic values as a company target and objective of business success;**

(k) **Develop and encourage the participation in gender audits of companies to assess their gender-sensitivity and responsiveness and level of parity in the division of responsibilities and company culture, providing incentives for good results, and request companies to report annually on measures taken 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, improving tax incentives, 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, including temporary special measures to reach parity in the digital economy, and in the development, management and decision-making regarding the technological transition, including the development and dissemination of AI 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 startup opportunities, such as in relation to environment and space;

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

(q) Legislate 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 campaigns on the equal responsibility of women and men in child raising and domestic duties;

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

(s) Invest in social infrastructure to allow women and men to take part in economic activities and share care responsibilities, including through the provision of free and/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 of givers and receivers of care 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 parents perform during parental leave, when they return to the job market, as well as provide access to optional continuing training courses for parents during maternity leave.

E. Women's rights in the private sphere as a pre-condition 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, is enshrined in the Convention and is 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' agency in these areas often remains very limited. It also underlines in GR 29 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/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 and girls and men and boys, including the integration of age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights into the school curriculum;

(d) Ensure full access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services, and remove legal and practical obstacles, including any denial of women's legal capacity, including of women and girls with disabilities to make health care 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 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 a zero-tolerance for all forms of violence., including those often tolerated by cultural and social norms and practices.

VI. Accountability and monitoring of State obligations to achieve parity 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.

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

(a) Make an express commitment and mobilize the resources needed to achieving the obligations in this GR, and adopt NAPs on parity in all spheres of decision-making by 2030;

(b) Mobilise regional organisations in the implementation of this GR;

(c) Develop mechanisms to monitor and evaluate progress towards this goal, including regular data collection and publication on women's representation in all areas and levels of decision-making, disaggregated including by age, ethnic and socioeconomic background and report this data largely, including to the Committee.

VII. Actions for the international community to ensure parity 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 UN bodies and mechanisms, including the main committees of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, and expert bodies, including treaty bodies, international tribunals, in appointments to independent working groups or as country or special rapporteurs, as well as in the leadership in multilateral institutions;

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

(e) Set up innovative development policies and international cooperation in line with the aims of this GR, strengthening national capacities and civil society support;

(f) Integrate the GR 40 framework of equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, including the extended approach to WPS, into the agenda and future resolutions of the UNSC, UNGA and HRC and consider the establishment of new mechanisms on parity to further support international engagement.