UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

# CEDAW General Recommendation No. 40 on the Equal and Inclusive Representation of Women in Decision-Making Systems

## Summary Note

## 1. Overview of GR 40

CEDAW General Recommendation No. 40 (GR 40) establishes a global roadmap to achieve **fifty-fifty gender parity** in decision-making systems. It recognizes equal and inclusive representation of women as a **fundamental human right** and a **game-changing solution** to overcome global challenges to achieving peace, political stability, economic inclusion, climate change mitigation as well as to ensure the inclusivity of technological advancement.

- **Parity**: Defined as **50-50 representation** of women and men across all decision-making spaces, both formal and informal.
- **Decision-Making Systems**: Encompass **political, public, economic, and digital spheres**, including emerging fields like Artificial Intelligence (AI).
- **Intersectionality**: GR 40 highlights the need for representation of **women in all their diversity** (including age, ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status).

## 2. Why Gender Parity in Decision-Making Matters

**A Game-Changing Solution to Global Challenges**

- **Peace and Political Stability**:
    - Women's participation improves **peace negotiations** and post-conflict stability.
    - Women remain underrepresented, holding only **16% of roles in peace processes**.
- **Economic Development**:
    - Parity fosters **inclusive economic policies** and eliminates systemic barriers.
    - Women are excluded from high-level economic roles. For example, only women constitute only **28% of managers** and **2% of venture capital** funding go to women.

- **Climate Action**:
    - Women's knowledge and leadership improve environmental policies.
    - Yet, women hold **only 15% of ministerial portfolios** in the environmental sector.
- **Technological Transformation**:
    - Women are underrepresented in **STEM fields** and AI development, further deepening **gender-bias in tech**.
    - GR 40 calls for a **human rights-based, including women's rights-based approach** to technological advances and correcting existing biases.
- **Inclusive Governance**:
    - Multilateral systems lack representation of women and young leaders. Parity is a conditioning element for the multilateral system's **legitimacy, resilience, and accountability**.

## 3. Seven Pillars for Achieving Gender Parity

To dismantle patriarchal structures and ensure equal representation, GR 40 is based on **seven transformative pillars**:

1. **Fifty-Fifty Parity**: Parity is not temporary but a **permanent norm** for governance.
2. **Youth Leadership**: Parity ensures that young women co-lead in building a sustainable and equal future.
3. **Intersectionality**: Ensures **women in all their diversity** access leadership roles.
4. **Comprehensive Systems**: Parity applies to **all decision-making spaces, levels and fields**.
5. **Equal Power and Influence**: Tokenistic representation is wrong; women must hold and equal number of **senior roles** and other **decision-making roles with the same influence across sectors**.
6. **Structural Transformation**: **Gender stereotypes and care work inequalities must be eliminated** to enable women's full and equal participation.
7. **Civil Society Engagement**: Spaces need to be established for women's organizations and women human rights defenders to have a voice, and notably in **all policy areas**, not just "women's issues."

## 4. Key Obligations for States Parties

States Parties to the CEDAW Convention are legally obligated to ensure the **equal and inclusive representation** of women in all decision-making systems. This requires systemic, legislative, and societal changes to dismantle patriarchal structures, address intersectional discrimination, and institutionalize parity across all spheres of life. GR 40 outlines **general** and **specific obligations** to guide States Parties toward achieving **fifty-fifty gender parity**.

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### A. General Obligations to Achieve Parity

#### 1. Ensuring Non-Discrimination and Substantive Equality

- **Repeal discriminatory laws** and constitutional provisions that perpetuate inequality and adopt and implement legislation **guaranteeing substantive equality** in all spheres.
- Institutionalize **fifty-fifty parity in the Constitution** and as a legal principle across all decision-making spaces.
- Implement **temporary special measures**, such as quotas or affirmative action, to accelerate parity.
- Develop **national parity action plans** with clear targets, timelines, and monitoring systems to achieve parity by **2030**.
- Establish or strengthen **monitoring bodies** and enforce penalties for failure to comply with parity requirements.

#### 2. Ensuring Intersectionality

- Adopt **legislative and policy measures** to eliminate multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.
- Collect and publish **disaggregated data** on the representation of women in all their diversity.
- Develop **inclusive recruitment strategies** to ensure women in marginalized situation access decision-making positions.
- Promote diverse **role models of women leaders**.

#### 3. Dismantling Gender Stereotypes

- Launch **awareness-raising campaigns** to dismantle stereotypes and reach gender parity in leadership.

- Regulate **media content** and digital platforms to eliminate sexist and misogynistic representations of women and promote non-biased representations.
- Integrate a **human rights-, including women's rights-based approach** to AI and digital technologies to eliminate biases and discriminatory outputs and to ensure technologies respond to the lived realities of women and men.
- Establish **mentoring programs** for women and girls for leadership.

4. **Freedom from Gender-Based Violence and Harassment**
   - Pass and enforce laws and carry out awareness-raising to prevent all forms of **gender-based violence** against women, including in political and public spaces, including online violence.
   - Introduce **codes of conduct** in government, political parties, and public institutions to prevent harassment and ensure independent complaint mechanisms.
   - Provide **security training** for women in leadership roles to address physical and digital threats.
   - Collect data on violence targeting women in decision-making positions to **assess the impact of prevention measures** and improve them accordingly.
5. **Education Towards Empowerment and Leadership**
   - Guarantee **gender equality in all areas of education** and eliminate gender segregation, with a particular focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics).
   - Integrate **women's rights, ethical leadership, and gender equality** into school curricula.
   - Provide **vocational training, mentorship programs**, and scholarships for girls and women to access leadership pathways.
   - Eliminate barriers like **school dropout**, especially due to child marriage, poverty, and gender-based violence.

## B. Specific Obligations in Key Sectors

1. **Parity in Political and Public Decision-Making**
    - Institutionalize **gender quotas** in elections, political parties, and public office appointments.
    - Enact **family-friendly policies** (e.g., flexible hours, parental leave, childcare support).
    - Adopt **gender audits** to assess parliaments, local governments, and public offices for responsiveness to gender parity.
    - Ensure **equal opportunities for women** to lead high-level positions, including heads of state, ministers, and mayors.
2. **Parity in International Decision-Making**
    - Achieve **gender parity** in diplomatic appointments, international delegations, and decision-making within multilateral institutions.
    - Implement a **feminist foreign policy** that promotes women's rights globally and prioritizes gender equality.
    - Institutionalize **transparent nomination processes** and parity targets for leadership roles in international organizations.
3. **Parity in Peace and Security Decision-Making**
    - Extend the **women, peace, and security agenda** to address new challenges, including **technology-driven threats** and **climate-related conflicts.**
    - Guarantee parity in **peace negotiations, conflict prevention, and transitional justice mechanisms**.
    - Prioritize the design and implementation of **gender-responsive disarmament** policies and reparations programs.
    - Establish **early warning systems** to detect gender-specific signs of instability, such as decreased women's participation and spikes in gender-based violence.
4. **Parity in Economic Decision-Making**
    - Ensure women's **equal access to leadership roles** in economic governance, including boards of companies, trade negotiations, and financial institutions.

- Adopt measures to **close the gender digital divide** and ensure women's equal participation in emerging sectors like AI and the digital economy.
- Ensure women's **economic autonomy,** including by addressing systemic barriers, such as unequal pay, lack of resources, and unpaid care work.
- Ensure substantive equality for **women entrepreneurs,** including in relation to public procurement opportunities.

5. **Parity in Private and Family Spheres**
    - Repeal laws and policies that discriminate against women, including in **marriage, property rights**, and inheritance.
    - Eliminate harmful practices such as **child marriage** and ensure access to **sexual and reproductive health and rights services**.
    - Take awareness-raising measures and incentives for **equal sharing of domestic and care responsibilities** between women and men.
    - Extend **social protections** to women performing unpaid care work or working in informal sectors.

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### C. Accountability and Monitoring

- States Parties must develop mechanisms to **track and report progress** on achieving gender parity across all sectors.
- Regularly collect and publish **gender-disaggregated data** to identify gaps and refine strategies.
- Establish strong partnerships with **civil society organizations**, including women's rights groups, to ensure meaningful participation in policymaking.

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By implementing the **comprehensive obligations enshrined in GR 40**, States Parties can achieve transformative change, ensuring that women's equal and inclusive representation becomes a universal norm and a driver of progress toward gender equality, peace, and sustainable development.

Click here: General recommendation No. 40 full document in the six UN languages

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