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Introduction and Background

The CEDAW Convention was adopted in 1979 and the Committee met for the first time in 1982. The Committee is mandated by article 21 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (the Convention) to develop General Recommendations with the aim of providing authoritative guidance to States parties on legislative, policy and other appropriate measures to ensure the implementation of their obligations under the Convention.

Since its inception Gender Recommendations have been developed and become more comprehensive over the years, you may be aware of the most recent GR adopted by the Committee – **GR40 - on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems** which benefitted greatly from support and collaboration with UN agencies such as the IPU and UNWomen. I would recommend to you states parties your familiarization with these general recommendations which provide useful guidance for your policy implementation.
With GR 41 this relationship with UNWOMEN continues and we are currently in discussions with IPU and welcome this opportunity to engage with UNECLAC once again, at the 67th Meeting of Presiding officers of Latin America and the Caribbean.

This GR is especially important in light of the recent Tatlelolco Commitment on the care society, because in the end this is what we want to achieve. Care and care work are at the centre of our work for gender equality and the valuation of women and girls's care work in all its forms. It also includes an imperative for men and boy's equal involvement in care work at all levels – paid and unpaid and an ethics of care to be part of our personal philosophies. In my comments on the

position paper presented at the UNECLAC Regional Conference on Women in Mexico City in August 2025 I observed that:

> "Despite the path breaking work of feminist scholars of the 1970s and 1980s on the value of housework and the valuation of domestic labour paid and unpaid, care and care policies continue to be undermined and undervalued. I am happy therefore that the position paper seeks to locate care and care work at the centre of public policy."

I also noted that:

> "Throughout this discussion is the underlying assumption that care workers are female and the majority are. The fact that caring is associated with women means that it takes on the negativity associated with femaleness and femininity, which makes it difficult for many men to willingly accept responsibilities for care. This will be addressed further in the presentation."[1]

General Recommendations have been used to 1. update existing General Recommendations by fully updating and creating new GRs or by adding addenda to existing GRs and 2. Introducing new GRS to address emerging issues that were not addressed in the Convention e.g. General recommendation No.37 (2018) on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in a changing climate. At its eighty-first session, held in February 2022, the Committee decided to develop a General Recommendation on the impact of gender stereotypes on the enjoyment by women of their rights enshrined in the Convention. The objective of this General Recommendation is to interpret States parties' obligations under Article 5 of the Convention to eliminate gender stereotypes underlying gender-based violence and discrimination against women and girls.

Definitional Issues

[1] Rhoda Reddock, Comments on the Presentation of the position paper : The Care Society: Governance, Political Economy and Social Dialogue for a Transformation with Gender Equality, Presentation to the Opening Plenary of the UNECLAC Regional Conference on Women, 13, August 20-25, p. 3.

Gender stereotypes could be defined as broad generalizations about the characteristics, responsibilities, and behaviours that are believed to be natural or appropriate for women and men. They are pervasive and deeply rooted in cultural norms, ideologies and belief systems, influencing societal attitudes and behaviours towards women and girls. They are rooted in ideas, belief systems, and patriarchal structures, prevalent to varying degrees in all societies and continue to manifest themselves in most areas of life, despite significant changes in many parts of the world due to international and domestic legal norms and increased awareness. Gender stereotypes, therefore, are not simply ideas floating across generations, but reflect systemic and structural ideologies deeply embedded in the notion of women and femaleness as inferior, lower in value and unequal to men.

Article 5 of our Convention mandates that we address this, where it states:

"(a) States Parties shall take all appropriate measures: (a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women; and

(b) recognises "the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children."

The Convention was therefore very perceptive and addressed what has proved to be the most difficult transformation required for gender equality and social justice; changing the patriarchal systems, ideas and beliefs that justify, construct and reproduce gender ideologies - ideas, belief systems and stereotypes.

It is important to note however that these ideologies, stereotypes and behaviours which ascribe lower value to femaleness, women and girls from birth, serve as barriers to the full development of their potential. They establish and support discriminatory practices in law, custom and all aspects of social and economic life which become accepted as social and gender norms.

These stereotypes and belief systems are resilient and deeply embedded but not fixed and change from time to time due to social and structural factors and can be changed. For example, it is well established that the status of stereotyped masculine occupations shifts with the proportion of women involved and vice versa. Research also shows that men in predominantly feminine occupations rise swiftly to the top, a phenomenon known as the Glass Escalator. This is because men by their presence are seen to bring status to these occupations, but they are also propelled into leadership sometime against their will, because of the discomfort with having them in these positions.

So rather than the stereotype determining women's inequality, women's structured inferior status moves with them and to any activity paid or unpaid, in which they predominate. For example teaching which was once a male-dominated occupation with much status and power, with its feminization, much of that has been lost. We need therefore to address the underlying power relations, structures and systems that produce and reproduce these stereotypes. These unequal systems are maintained through varying forms of gender-based violence, social sanctions and unequal social and economic systems which affect access to financial and material resources, including wages and salaries, education, employment, and healthcare.

Intersectionality

The concept of **intersectionality** captures "The complex way in which multiple forms of discrimination"[2] e.g. racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, ability, nationality and others combine, overlap, and intersect to shape the lives of individuals and groups. Not only are women discriminated as women but other factors shape the specific lived experiences of individuals and groups of women e.g. indigenous women, afro-descendent women, women and girls with disabilities or working class, LBTI and rural women and girls. Many women and girls therefore, also face stigmatizing stereotypes based on intersecting structures of inequality e.g. rural indigenous women. This has been a very important aspect of our work in CEDAW

[2] Adapted from - https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intersectionality, concept originally developed by Kimberlė Crenshaw.

and in developing this GR we plan to address these intersectional stereotypes that shape the specific experiences of diverse groups of women.

Tradition

Gender stereotypes and the ideologies that they represent, are justified under the banners of "tradition," "culture," "religion" or even "nature." These are powerful mechanisms used to affirm and preserve unequal power relations, based on the idea that women were inferior to men. Discriminatory practices against women and girls need to be eliminated, regardless of their origins, including those perpetuated in the name of tradition, culture or religion. We aim therefore, to challenge the ideological power of the notion of 'tradition,' which has been a powerful weapon in the arsenal of gender ideologies and stereotypes. Women in many ways are perceived as the symbols of tradition and keepers of the home and community. Tradition is perceived as always having been there, stable and unchanging, especially those related to women and girls. Stereotypes justified by tradition therefore weigh heavily on women and girls in many societies.

In many societies there were historically, practices that empowered women, in some more than others, but these are not usually the traditions or cultural practices maintained. The reality is that many contemporary 'traditions' are discriminatory to women, relatively recent or were introduced, selectively maintained or adjusted by colonizers and missionaries. This has been described as the invention of Tradition[3]. Women usually have the responsibility to maintain and pass on these traditions, sometimes symbolized in their own bodies and appearance, even when they discriminate against them and their daughters.

[3] Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, 31 Jul 1992 https://books.google.tt/books/about/The_Invention_of_Tradition.html?id=sfvnNdVY3KIC&redir_esc=y

Men and Boys

Article 5 of the Convention calls on us to recognise "the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children." this mandates us to address this thorny but ever-present issue. At our Half Day of General Discussion in January 2025, which launched this GR41 process, the representative of the organisation MenEngage, observed that: "Transforming stereotypes about men is a crucial, yet often overlooked, strategy to end gender-based violence and discrimination and to advance equality." She argued that those who hold patriarchal power should also be a focus of this GR .

This is also where the politics of care and the care society comes into play, with the revaluation of the status of care as important and worthy activity for women and girls as well as men and boys.

The Implementation Process

The Development of this GR is a two-year process which began in January 2025 and will be concluded in December 2026.

Preparation and endorsement of a Concept Note

The process began with the preparation of a concept which is available for download on the CEDAW website. The rest of the process is as follows:

Half-day of general discussion - 17 February 2025

As mentioned earlier, the Committee convened a half-day of general discussion on gender stereotypes organized by OHCHR. A panel of expert speakers from the UN system, other international organizations, academia and civil society discussed relevant themes for the elaboration of the draft GR. States Parties, UN agencies, National Human Rights Institutions, NGOs, the private sector and academia, added their contributions to the development of the General Recommendation.

Expert group meetings 2025-2026

Expert meetings are part of this two-year developmental process and facilitate discussions that elaborate on the concept and highlight the specific manifestations of gender stereotypes, attitudes and related practices and their implications for women's human rights in various parts of the world. The Committee encourages academia and civil society to convene expert group meetings throughout 2025. They provide the opportunity to discuss specific approaches to the issue and provide inputs for the development of the draft General Recommendation.

Expert group meetings that have so far taken place in Lima, Peru, and currently planned for Berne in Switzerland and Buenos Aires, Argentina later this year.

Regional and Subregional consultations - 2026

The Committee plans to hold five regional consultations respectively in **Europe and Central Asia**, **the Middle East and Northern Africa sub-region**, **Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia** and **Latin America and the Caribbean**. Each consultation is planned to last for one or two days, depending on financial support. These consultations aim to identify good practices and remaining challenges in each region, as well as central issues that should be addressed in the General Recommendation. The preparation of these regional consultations would be under the responsibility of OHCHR in Geneva, while OHCHR Regional Offices as well as other UN agencies e.g. UNWomen would be the main hosts supporting the implementation of these consultations. Sub-regional consultations are also organised based on specific subregional interest and capacity. For example in April 2025, a sub-regional consultation for the pacific Region was held in Fiji in collaboration with the special CEDAW regional session organized at time. In relation to GR40, a sub-regional consultation was organized for the Caribbean supported by UNWomen and CIWIL.

Drafting of GR 41

The first draft of this GR was completed by the consultant Ms Rosa Celorio whose professional competence I must acknowledge. We are extremely lucky to have her working with us. Based on

comments from the CEDAW Working Group for GR41, it is currently being revised. The Second draft will be reviewed by the Working group in December, revised in January and uploaded to the website in February 2026 for public comment by NGOs, academia and civil society.

First and Final Readings, Publication and Dissemination

The first Reading by the Committee will be in June/July 2025 and the final reading and adoption will be in October 2026. Following the publication of the general recommendation, a guidance document and an online application for its implementation will be produced and disseminated to States Parties, national and regional human rights institutions and actors including civil society organisations.

Then ladies and Gentlemen, the ball will be in your court. With the active mobilization by civil society we will depend on you for the implementation and further dissemination of this very important General Recommendation.

Thank You

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UNCEDAW Committee