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HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER



Ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

A toolkit

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About the Toolkit

The 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights celebrated in 2023 is an occasion to renew the ground-breaking commitments made by States when they adopted the text in 1948. The Declaration has inspired the norms and standards that are embodied in the core human rights treaties and their optional protocols. These instruments aim to realize the rights contained in the Declaration, by making human rights universal legal entitlements with legally binding obligations for States.

Ratifying these instruments is an essential means to translating the human rights enshrined in the Declaration into reality on the ground, while conveying a message of commitment to human rights to the international community.

Human Rights 75 is an initiative led by UN Human Rights and its partners. It seeks, among others, to promote universality and renewed commitment, including through a campaign advocating for the ratification of the core human rights treaties and their optional protocols. In this context, States are called upon to demonstrate their commitment to the protection and respect of human rights by ratifying outstanding human rights instruments.

This toolkit presents the benefits of ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), answers questions on its content and application, provides a simplified version of the provisions of the Convention and offers practical information on ratification and accession of treaties.



Why Ratify?

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is a legally binding instrument that guarantees women's enjoyment of key civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights on an equal basis with men. Through the Convention, States take action by all appropriate means and without delay to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and to pursue gender equality in all aspects of life.

Ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women:



- 1. Sends an unequivocal message to the international community** that the State does not tolerate discrimination against women and girls.
- 2. Enables the State to join the group of States parties** that have voluntarily undertaken legal human rights obligations and have demonstrated international commitments to pursue gender equality.

Why Ratify?



3. Provides duty bearers with a key legal instrument, a tool to achieve positive change in the civil, cultural, economic, political and social aspects and public and private spheres of life for all women and girls.



4. Enables the State to remedy systemic and structural discrimination against women and to achieve de facto equality of women and men.

5. Provides for an international legal framework that prohibits discrimination against women and girls in the enjoyment of their human rights, including by promulgating the State's obligations to protect women and girls from discrimination and violence and to guarantee their equal enjoyment of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.



6. Facilitates action against gender inequality including during crises and emergencies, such as pandemics, armed conflicts, and climate change, considering that such crises disproportionately impact women and girls, eroding their hard-won achievements.

7. Brings the benefit of expert advice from the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women through constructive dialogues with the State concerned, resulting in the issuance of recommendations tailored to each country's context and the lived realities of women and girls.

Why Ratify?



8. Strengthens international collaboration and provides mutual learning opportunities on human rights of women and girls and strategies to address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination against women and girls, providing platforms to exchange good practices, challenges and lessons learnt.

9. Provides normative guidance for law- and policy- makers, practitioners, judiciary and others who can refer to the Committee's recommendations for the State concerned as well as its general recommendations on a number of women's rights issues such as 'gender-based violence against women', 'women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations' or 'gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in a changing climate', among others.

Frequently Asked Questions



There are several other human rights treaties that prohibit discrimination between women and men in the enjoyment of human rights. What is the purpose of ratifying CEDAW?

While the prohibition of discrimination against women is also codified in several other human rights treaties, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, and while it is the State's obligation to implement all human rights treaties without gender-based discrimination, CEDAW additionally seeks to eliminate all forms of discrimination that disproportionately affect women in all areas of life and in both private or public spheres, and to achieve de facto equality for women and men. The Convention details how to enforce civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights for women and girls; it is a tool to better understand what a gender-based approach means in practice.

How has the Convention contributed to achieving gender equality so far?

Among its many achievements, the Convention has contributed to ensuring in different countries equal citizenship rights, equal inheritance rights, equal property rights, and equal rights to political participation. It has also fostered the adoption of laws on gender equality, laws prohibiting discrimination against women and girls in access to land, domestic violence laws, legislation criminalizing all forms of violence against women, and anti-trafficking laws. It has led to a national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women. The Convention has also been instrumental for States to take measures for introducing gender-responsive budgeting and for rolling out gender-responsive rural economic development projects.

Frequently Asked Questions



Does the Convention include a reporting procedure?

Yes. States must submit periodically a report on measures taken to implement the Convention. States can solicit support from OHCHR for the preparation of reports and for streamlining national processes in relation to other international and regional reporting obligations, including those under the 2030 Agenda.

What are the financial implications of ratifying or acceding to the Convention?

Although the ratification of the Convention itself does not create financial obligations at the international level, there may be costs at the national level that are associated with legal and policy reforms and implementation measures to give effect to the Convention. Some of these financial implications at the national level may be absorbed into existing national policies and programmes.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)



Entry into force: 3 September 1981, in accordance with article 27(1)

Registration: 3 September 1981, No. 20378

Status as of August 2024: Signatories : 99. Parties : 189

Procedural provisions of the Convention have been omitted.

PART I

Definition of "discrimination against women" (Art. 1):

"Discrimination against women" is any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex, which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the civil, cultural, economic, political and social or any other field by women.

Nature of obligations (Art. 2):

States Parties to the Convention condemn discrimination against women in all its forms and agree to pursue a policy of eliminating discrimination against women and to:

- (a) Incorporate the principle of the equality of men and women in their national constitutions or other appropriate legislation, and ensure the practical realization of this principle;*
- (b) Prohibit all discrimination against women by adopting legislation and other measures, including sanctions where appropriate;*
- (c) Establish legal protection of the rights of women as well as their protection against any act of discrimination, through competent national tribunals and other public institutions;*
- (d) Refrain from engaging in any act or practice of discrimination against women;*
- (e) Take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise;*
- (f) Take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women;*
- (g) Repeal all national penal provisions which constitute discrimination against women.*

Simplified Version

Appropriate Measures (Art. 3):

States shall take all appropriate measures in all fields to guarantee that women and girls can enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms and ensure their full development and advancement.

Temporary special measures (Art. 4):

Measures adopted with the objective of accelerating progress towards gender equality should not be considered discrimination. However, such special measures should cease once equality of opportunity and treatment has been achieved.

Gender stereotypes (Art. 5):

States shall take all appropriate measures to modify patterns of behaviour of men and women in order to eliminate harmful gender stereotypes and prejudices. They shall ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of maternity as a social function, including the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children.

Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution (Art. 6):

States shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women.

PART II

Political and public life (Art. 7):

States shall eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life. States shall ensure that women, on an equal basis with men, have the rights to vote and to be eligible for election to public office, to participate in the formulation and implementation of government policy, to hold public office and perform public functions at all levels of government, and to participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

Simplified Version

Participation at the international level (Art. 8):

States shall ensure that women, on an equal basis with men, have the rights to represent their country at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations.

Nationality (Art. 9):

States shall ensure that women have equal rights with men to acquire, change or retain their nationality, and to the nationality of their children. Women shall be allowed to retain their nationality after marrying someone with a different nationality.

PART III

Education (Art. 10):

States shall eliminate discrimination against women and ensure equal rights in education, including:

1. Equal conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies, and for the achievement of diplomas in institutions of all categories, at all levels and in all forms of education;
2. Access to the same curricula, the same examinations, teachers with qualifications of the same standard, and school premises and equipment of the same quality;
3. The elimination of any stereotypes of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education;
4. Equal opportunities to benefit from scholarships and other study grants;
5. Equal opportunities for access to programmes of continuing education, especially those aimed at reducing any gap in education between men and women;
6. The reduction of female student drop-out rates and the organization of programmes for girls and women who have left school prematurely;
7. Equal opportunities to participate actively in sports and physical education;
8. Access to specific educational information to help ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning.

Simplified Version

Employment (Art. 11):

States shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in employment and ensure that women, on an equal basis with men, have:

- The right to work;
- The right to equal employment opportunities, including the application of equal criteria for employment;
- The right to freely choose employment, the right to promotion, job security and all benefits and conditions of service and the right to receive vocational training;
- The right to equal remuneration and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value;
- The right to social security;
- The right to protection of health and to safety in working conditions.

States shall take appropriate measures to prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of marriage or maternity and to ensure their effective right to work.

Health care (Art. 12):

States shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in health care and ensure their equal access to health care services, including services for family planning and reproductive health.

Economic and social life (Art. 13):

States shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in economic and social life, ensuring equal rights to family benefits, financial assistance including access to bank loans and credits, and participation in cultural life.

Rural women (Art. 14):

States shall consider the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant role that they play in the economic survival of their families. States shall take all appropriate measures to guarantee the application of the Convention to women in rural areas and to eliminate discrimination against them in order to ensure that they can equally participate in and benefit from rural development.

Simplified Version

PART IV

Equality before the law and freedom of movement (Art. 15):

States shall ensure that women and men are equal before the law. States shall recognize the legal capacity of women, including in civil capacity matters such as rights to conclude contracts and to administer property. States shall treat women and men equal in all stages of procedure in courts and tribunals. States shall also guarantee that women and men have equal rights regarding the law on the movement of persons and the freedom to choose residence and domicile.

Marriage and family life (Art. 16):

States shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in marriage and family relations. States shall ensure that women and men have equal rights to enter into marriage and only with their free and full consent, equal rights to choose a spouse, equal rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution, equal rights and responsibilities in matters of parenthood and guardianship, equal rights as spouses to choose a family name, profession and occupation, equal rights as spouses regarding their marital property. The marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and States shall take all necessary action to set a minimum age for marriage and officially register all marriages.

PART V

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (Art. 17):

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women consists of 23 members serving in their individual capacity, independently and impartially, elected by the States parties to the Convention, each State party may nominate one person among their nationals. They are elected for a term of four years.

Reporting (Art. 18):

States undertake to submit a report on the implementation of the Convention one year after the Convention enters into force for the State party and subsequently at least every four years or whenever the Committee so requests.

Process for Ratification and Accession

What is ratification?

When a State ratifies an international human rights treaty, it legally commits to implement its provisions. By depositing instruments of ratification, a State expresses its consent to be bound by the treaty. Ratification is preceded by the signature of the treaty. Upon the signature, the State is obliged not to act contrary to the object and purpose of the treaty. The State may use the time between the signature and ratification to enact the necessary legislation to ensure the application of the treaty nationally.

What is accession?

Accession is the act by which a State accepts to become a party to a treaty that has already been negotiated and signed by other States. It has the same legal effect as ratification. Accession usually takes place after the treaty has entered into force.

What are the steps for formalizing a ratification or accession?

Model instruments of ratification or accession can be found on the [United Nations Treaty Collection](#) website. These templates are available in all six UN languages. The date indicated in the instrument of ratification or accession is the date on which the State becomes bound by the treaty. More information is available in the [Treaty Handbook](#). The annexes to the model instruments of full powers, ratification and accession are also available in this toolkit.

Once completed and signed by the competent authority in the State, e.g., the Head of State or Government or the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the signed copy of the original instrument can be emailed to treatysection@un.org for deposit. However, the originals must be delivered to the Treaty Section as soon as they arrive at the Permanent Mission in New York. The Depositary Unit office is at 2 UN Plaza, 323 E 44th Street, 5th Floor, Room DC2-0500, Tel: 1-212 963 504. New York, NY 10017 USA.

The Permanent Representative in New York may deliver instruments of ratification or accession. There may be a ceremony for the deposit of instruments ([pictures](#)). Alternatively, the Government may wish to deposit the instruments at the Treaty Event held during the opening of the General Assembly, which will provide a high-level setting for this treaty action and give visibility to the Government's commitment to human rights.

ANNEX I

MODEL INSTRUMENT OF FULL POWERS

(To be signed by the Head of State, Head of Government or Minister for Foreign Affairs)

FULL POWERS

I, [name and title of the Head of State, Head of Government or Minister for Foreign Affairs],

HEREBY AUTHORIZE [name and title] to [sign ², ratify, denounce, effect the following declaration in respect of, etc.] the [title and date of treaty, convention, agreement, etc.] on behalf of the Government of [name of State].

Done at [place] on [date].

[Signature]

² * Subject to the provisions of the treaty, one of the following alternatives is to be chosen: [subject to ratification] or [without reservation as to ratification]. Reservations made upon signature must be authorized by the full powers granted to the signator

ANNEX II

MODEL INSTRUMENT OF RATIFICATION, ACCEPTANCE OR APPROVAL

(To be signed by the Head of State, Head of Government or Minister for Foreign Affairs)

[RATIFICATION / ACCEPTANCE / APPROVAL]

WHEREAS the [title of treaty, convention, agreement, etc.] was [concluded, adopted, opened for signature, etc.] at [place] on [date],

AND WHEREAS the said [treaty, convention, agreement, etc.] has been signed on behalf of the Government of [name of State] on [date],

NOW THEREFORE I, [name and title of the Head of State, Head of Government or Minister for Foreign Affairs] declare that the Government of [name of State], having considered the above-mentioned [treaty, convention, agreement, etc.], [ratifies, accepts, approves] the same and undertakes faithfully to perform and carry out the stipulations therein contained.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have signed this instrument of [ratification, acceptance, approval] at [place] on [date].

[Signature]

MODEL INSTRUMENT OF ACCESSION

(To be signed by the Head of State, Head of Government or Minister for Foreign Affairs)

ACCESSION

WHEREAS the [title of treaty, convention, agreement, etc.] was [concluded, adopted, opened for signature, etc.] at [place] on [date],

NOW THEREFORE I, [name and title of the Head of State, Head of Government or Minister for Foreign Affairs] declare that the Government of [name of State], having considered the above-mentioned [treaty, convention, agreement, etc.], accedes to the same and undertakes faithfully to perform and carry out the stipulations therein contained.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have signed this instrument of accession at [place] on [date].

[Signature]

