



## **Access to justice and gender stereotyping: The contribution of CEDAW**

**March 11<sup>th</sup> 2026, Conference Room E, 3:00 to 4:15 pm, UNHQ**

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### **Background**

The seventieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women will take place at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 9 to 19 March 2026. This year's priority theme will be "ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls, including by promoting inclusive and equitable legal systems, eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, and addressing structural barriers."

### **Access to justice, the CEDAW convention and the CEDAW Committee**

As part of the international human rights system, the CEDAW Convention is a legally binding instrument which is fundamental for women's claims to access justice without discrimination. Women must have equal status with men, in law and in judicial procedures; judicial institutions and actors must be gender sensitive and gender responsive; and women's and girls' specific claims must be recognized by law.

The CEDAW Committee has always affirmed that the right to access to justice for women is essential to the realization of all the rights protected under the Convention. It further affirmed that discriminatory laws and harmful practices must be repealed and that violations of women's rights must be sanctioned accordingly. In 2015, the Committee adopted General Recommendation No. 33 on Women's Access to Justice, specifying the obligations of State parties to eliminate gender discrimination and ensure gender equality, in laws, procedures and practices, in criminal, civil, administrative, labour and social matters. In particular, it found that beyond formal legal and procedural barriers, a series of structural barriers impede women and girls accessing justice in practice, including gender stereotyping in the judicial system, with far reaching consequences on the impartiality, credibility and the accuracy of judicial decisions.

### **Gender stereotyping and access to justice**

Recognizing gender stereotyping as a form of discrimination which expresses and reinforces, dominant social and cultural norms regarding sex and gender, the CEDAW Committee has agreed to elaborate a new General Recommendation (GR 41) on gender stereotypes, which will provide guidance on the obligations of state and non-state actors to end gender stereotyping in all aspects of women and girls' lives. The Committee notes that gender stereotypes are often reflected in practices and discriminatory laws,



procedural and evidentiary requirements, hindering women's access to justice. Based on articles 2 and 5, the CEDAW General Recommendation No. 41 on gender stereotypes will focus on questions such as: how do gender stereotypes relate to gender discrimination? How should gender stereotypes be dismantled? What are the responsibilities of State authorities and other powerholders to address gender stereotypes?

UN Women is collaborating with the CEDAW Committee in the elaboration of this General Recommendation through sharing of evidence from its research on discriminatory social norms and convening civil society consultations across the globe to provide inputs to GR 41.

## Objectives

The side event will aim to:

- Highlight the role of the CEDAW Convention in setting the basis for access to justice for women and girls;
- Share the insights of and recommendations from CEDAW General Recommendation No. 33 on Women's Access to Justice, on State Parties' obligations to ensure access to justice for women and girls;
- Share reflections from the ongoing elaboration process of the new CEDAW General Recommendation No. 41, on how gender stereotypes impede women's and girls' access to justice, how concretely they manifest themselves in the judicial system, what impact they have, and how to dismantle them.

## Proposed agenda

75 min duration in total, facilitation by Ms. Brenda Akia, Rapporteur of the CEDAW Committee

1. **Opening statements** (5 min each, 15 min total)
  - Chair of the CEDAW Committee, Ms. Nahla Haidar
  - UN Women's Deputy Executive Director, Ms. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda
  - H.E. Ms. Elisabeth Baume-Schneider, Federal Councillor, Head of Switzerland's Federal Department of Home Affairs.
2. **CEDAW's role in ensuring access to justice** (8 min)
  - Ms. Patsilí Toledo Vásquez, CEDAW Member, to present the approach and reflections from CEDAW General Recommendation No.33 on Women's Access to Justice.
3. **The role of gender stereotypes in impeding women's full access to justice** (35 min)



- Short introduction (8 min) by Ms. Bandana Rana, co-chair of the CEDAW Working Group on GR 41 about the rationale for, the objectives of, the ongoing process for elaborating GR 41.
- Short inputs from and panel discussion (5 min each, 20 min total)
  - Ms. Hyeslin Park, Head of the Gender and Development Unit of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
  - Ms. Silvia Serrano, Co-Director of the O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law at Georgetown University
  - Ms. Judith Pallarés, Secretary General of the Andorran Women's Institute
  - Ms. Terrydale Ince, Founder of the CEDAW Committee of Trinidad and Tobago (CCoTT)

Key questions: How are stereotypes impacting on access to justice of women and girls? How can stereotypes in the legal and judicial systems be identified and dismantled? What recommendations can be made to State parties?

4. **Concluding statement** (5 min each, 15 min total)

- H.E. Ms. Mariona Cadena, Secretary of State for Equality and Citizen Participation (Andorra)
- Ms. Erika Schläppi, CEDAW Member
- Ms. Jelena Pia-Comella, CEDAW Member