



CEDAW

THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL
FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

WHAT IS CEDAW AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Often referred to as the ‘women’s bill of rights’, CEDAW is significant in the international human rights framework because it is exclusively devoted to gender equality. CEDAW spells out in detail women’s human right to equality and non-discrimination, and maps out the range of actions that must be taken to achieve this equality. It is one of the core international human rights treaties of the United Nations and it requires States parties to undertake legal obligations to respect, protect and fulfil women’s human rights.

The UK ratified CEDAW in 1986, and its implementation is monitored by a UN committee called the CEDAW Committee. The CEDAW Committee is made up of a body of 23 independent experts, who are responsible for questioning the UK on its progress towards protecting and realising women’s human rights.

Here are a few reasons why CEDAW is important:

- It provides a complete definition of sex-based discrimination, described as any exclusion, restriction or distinction on the grounds of sex, which intentionally or unintentionally impairs or nullifies the recognition, enjoyment and exercise of women’s social, cultural, political and economic rights.
- CEDAW recognises the root causes of discrimination, including within culture. CEDAW recognises that traditional gender roles and stereotypes have to be eliminated if we are to be successful in ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls.
- The view of equality in CEDAW is based on the principle of ‘substantive equality’ between men and women. This principle acknowledges that equality of opportunity and equal treatment is not enough to redress women’s inequality. In fact, it recognises that equal opportunity initiatives can actually have a negative impact on women if women spend time and energy to take advantage of these initiatives but see no result. Substantive equality means looking at women’s lives and the condition of their lives as a measure of whether equality has been achieved.
- CEDAW holds its States parties – which includes the UK Government – to account to respect, protect and fulfil women’s human rights. It does this by investigating and making



engender.org.uk/cedaw



CEDAW

**THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL
FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

recommendations to address gender inequality at all levels (e.g., family, community, market and state).

HOW IS ENGENDER INVOLVED IN CEDAW?

Every five years, the CEDAW Committee asks the UK Government (including officials from the Scottish Government) to appear before it and explain how women's rights have progressed since the last review. In its review, the Committee also hears from non-governmental organisations, including Engender, on whether women's organisations agree with the UK Government's assessment of gender equality.

Our work this year is gearing up to preparing for these appearances and, more broadly, for the UN Committee's review of the UK Government's implementation of CEDAW. By collecting evidence on what's been happening with/to women's rights in Scotland, we intend to develop a list of questions for the CEDAW Committee to ask representatives from the UK Government. We will also be drafting written evidence for review by the Committee, including contributing to the report that civil society organisations across the UK will be co-authoring for the CEDAW Committee members. You can find our previous questions as well as written briefings [here](#).

Once the CEDAW Committee concludes its review, it releases a set of findings, called 'concluding observations', which require the Government to take concrete steps to enable the realisation of women's rights.

HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED IN THE CEDAW PROCESS?

We want your voice to be heard, and we want your opinion and expertise to inform the evidence and materials we develop for the CEDAW Committee.

There are three different ways you can get involved:

1. Complete our survey;
2. Respond to our call for evidence; and/or
3. Participate in one of our workshops.

Our survey is tailored to collecting and understanding your view of women's rights in Scotland. It asks a series of questions related to employment, education, media, representation, violence



engender.org.uk/cedaw



CEDAW

**THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL
FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

against women and other themes. The survey can be submitted anonymously, meaning you don't have to provide your name or any other personal information that could identify you.

If you'd like to share your or your organisations view of the policy and legislative landscape as it relates to women's rights and equality in Scotland, we'd suggest taking a look at our call for evidence. It asks broad questions about women's rights and equality in Scotland, and the actions – or inaction – by various institutions to fulfil women's rights and contribute to a more gender equal society.

If neither of these is your preferred option, you can participate in one of our upcoming workshops. Stay tuned for information on workshop dates and location. We're keen to hear your views on where we are today and how we can progress in future.

WHAT HAS THE CEDAW COMMITTEE SAID ABOUT WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE UK?

The last examination of CEDAW in the UK concluded in 2013, when the CEDAW Committee released its concluding observations. We've developed a chart to walk you through the concerns that were noted by the Committee as well as their recommendations on how the UK could improve on its commitment to respect, protect and fulfil women's human rights. You can find that [here](#).



engender.org.uk/cedaw