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**SHAPING THE INTERNATIONAL AGENDA:  
RAISING WOMEN'S VOICES IN INTERNATIONAL FORUMS**

**Summary**

The originators of the attached publication aim to build knowledge on women's participation in national delegations to meetings of international organizations' governing bodies and their leadership roles in these meetings. It is based on responses to a questionnaire addressed to members of the United Nations Governing Bodies Secretariats network and of the International Gender Champions-Geneva.

It provides 22 recommendations addressed to Member States, secretariats of United Nations governing bodies, Ministers, ambassadors, heads of organizations to improve women's participation in international decision-making processes.

**Action required**

This publication is transmitted to the Council **for information**.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE WAY FORWARD:  
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

In their efforts to increase the participation of women, Member States should consider the following measures:

The secretariats of United Nations governing bodies can provide support to Member States by taking the following actions:

Ministers, ambassadors, heads of organizations and other senior officials – both women and men – should consider taking the following actions:

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MARCH 2017

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UN-Women is the United Nations organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN-Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UN-Women supports United Nations Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with Governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priorities: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN-Women also coordinates and promotes the United Nations system's work in advancing gender equality.

[www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)



The International Gender Champions is a leadership network that brings together female and male decision makers to break down gender barriers. It was launched in October 2015 by the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, together with the United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva and the non-governmental organization Women@TheTable.

The decision to launch the International Gender Champions was based on a common realization that 20 years after the Beijing Declaration, little had changed and that real change in this field required greater visibility at the highest levels. All potential Champions sign the Panel Parity Pledge and have to commit to at least two additional and personalized measures to advance gender equality within their own organization. Over 300 commitments have now been made. Though tailored to each organization, common themes have emerged such as recruitment and promotion of talented women, changes in organizational culture, women's representation on delegations or the development of policies or strategic frameworks on gender and diversity.

<http://genderchampions.com>



With the support of the International Telecommunications Union and the Australian Permanent Mission and Consulate-General in Geneva, as co-leaders of the 2016 International Gender Champions Impact Group on Women in Delegations.

The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and cannot be regarded as reflecting the views of the Government of Australia.

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Without the equal participation of women in decision-making at all levels, peace, development, human rights and justice cannot be achieved. Equal participation also ensures that women's voices and perspectives inform policies and actions. Member States of the United Nations have upheld and reiterated the rights of women to full, effective and equal participation in decision-making through the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, General Assembly resolutions, and agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women. Yet women remain underrepresented in all fields, especially at the highest levels. In January 2017, there were only 19 women Heads of State or Government and, in 2015, women ministers represented only 17 per cent of ministerial posts. Only three women have served as President of the United Nations General Assembly in the past 71 sessions. Women are also underrepresented among permanent representatives to the United Nations, at only around 20 per cent in New York and 27 per cent in Geneva in December 2016.

Business as usual is not an option. To fulfil the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including Sustainable Development Goal 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, **concrete actions and intensified commitments to improve women's participation and representation are needed.**

In early 2016, the International Gender Champions–Geneva<sup>1</sup> started to look closely at the number of women in delegations to governing bodies of Geneva-based international organizations. At its annual meeting in 2016, the United Nations Governing Bodies Secretariat<sup>2</sup> further discussed gender balance in the governing bodies of international organizations and agreed to support efforts to promote women's participation and advance the goal of gender balance across their conferences and meetings.

This publication aims to **build knowledge on women's participation in national delegations to meetings of international organizations' governing bodies and their leadership roles in these meetings.** It is based on responses to a questionnaire addressed to members of the United Nations Governing Bodies Secretariat and of the International Gender Champions–Geneva. Although the results of the survey may not be representative of all United Nations organizations, they have yielded important information on the current policies and practices in the 23 entities that took part.

Based on the responses, six types of actions to improve women's participation in governing body meetings have been identified: (a) explicit policies and mandated targets; (b) tracking and reporting; (c) training and capacity-building; (d) financial support; (e) advocacy and networking; and (f) communications strategies.

The survey results are complemented by an overview of intergovernmental and inter-agency frameworks and trends in women's participation in national Governments and intergovernmental forums. Best practices in promoting women's participation at different levels – national and multilateral – are also presented with the aim of informing concrete recommendations on the way forward to realize gender balance in international organizations' governing bodies.

As the first publication of its kind, it is intended to be a handy source of information and advocacy tool that can empower a wide range of gender-equality advocates to champion gender equality, women's empowerment and gender balance in their work and across their networks.

<sup>1</sup> See <http://genderchampions.com> (accessed 18 January 2017).  
<sup>2</sup> The United Nations Governing Bodies Secretariat is a network of specialized agencies, programmes and departments of the United Nations that meets annually in an informal session to discuss issues specific to the governance of their respective organizations. Meetings are attended by high-level representation from secretariats of governing bodies of the United Nations system's organizations, those responsible for formulating policy and/or directing the affairs of the institution in partnership with senior management and stakeholders. See <http://ungbswbgs.wordpress.com/about> (accessed 18 January 2017).

# THE WAY FORWARD: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS<sup>3</sup>

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To improve women’s participation and achieve gender balance in government delegations and in international decision-making processes, **the goal of gender parity must be promoted at the earliest stages of planning and supported by the most senior officials**. Targeted strategies, backed by strong political will of senior leaders in Governments, and adequate resources are crucial. The policies and practices of various intergovernmental organizations highlighted below offer a good foundation that United Nations agencies can build on, both individually and collectively. To underpin these efforts, the international community should provide guidance and support to Governments to improve women’s participation at the national level, which has a direct impact on their participation in international forums.

### In their efforts to increase the participation of women, Member States should consider the following measures:

1. Institute **temporary special measures** such as quotas for the overall composition of delegations to governing bodies to ensure that women make up at least 30 per cent, aiming for a gradual increase to 50 per cent
2. Apply quotas to their own national delegations to ensure **at least 30 per cent of their delegates** to conferences and meetings are women, with a gradual increase to 50 per cent
3. Use/establish enforcement mechanisms to complement targets or quotas in order to ensure compliance, such as a “comply or explain” rule
4. Expand leadership opportunities (such as Chairs, Co-Chairs or facilitators) through the practices of co-leadership of one woman and one man; rotating leadership, where no consecutive terms are held by persons of the same gender; or alternate Chairs of the opposite gender
5. Target training and capacity-building activities at women delegates to increase women’s participation in leadership and technical positions
6. Raise awareness and train both women and men delegates on issues related to gender equality and gender balance in order to enhance their understanding of and responsiveness to these issues and build greater support for women’s participation
7. Dedicate travel and capacity-building **funding to women delegates** to ensure their full and equal participation
8. Develop communications strategies to build awareness of the goal of gender balance, such as the inclusion of resolutions and decisions related to gender equality and gender balance on invitations to conferences and meetings, notifications for nominations, elections and appointments, relevant Internet sites and other forms of communication
9. Create opportunities for discussion, networking and collaboration among women delegates as well as between women delegates and representatives from women’s organizations

<sup>3</sup> UN-Women and Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice, “The full view: ensuring a comprehensive approach to achieve the goal of gender balance in the UNFCCC process”, 2nd ed., November 2016.

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The secretariats of United Nations governing bodies can provide support to Member States by taking the following actions:

1. Collect, analyse and disseminate data disaggregated by sex of delegates attending conferences and meetings, as well as of Chairs, Co-Chairs and facilitators
2. Create and maintain a readily accessible and centralized roster of female experts, speakers and panellists to ensure gender balance in panels and meetings
3. Collaborate with organizations such as UNITAR and UN-Women to develop capacity-building and training programmes with the aim of promoting gender balance on governing bodies and at international conferences and meetings (in planning these activities, consideration should be given to any access, financial, language, transport and other difficulties that may prevent women from participating, and efforts should be made to address these challenges or barriers)
4. Provide information, regularly and systematically, to Member States when they are constituting bodies and informal groups or appointing facilitators and Chairs, on available measures to promote gender balance
5. Acknowledge and publicize efforts to ensure gender-balanced delegations

Ministers, ambassadors, heads of organizations and other senior officials – both women and men – should consider taking the following actions:

1. Develop a gender-equality policy, strategy or action plan for the organization or office, identifying specific objectives, measures, actors, deadlines and resources; if a policy or action plan is already in place, ensure implementation through a regular reporting and review mechanism
2. Support efforts to ensure gender balance in their delegations to the United Nations and other international organizations, including through gender-responsive budgeting
3. Engage in communications campaigns and strategies to improve access for women, raise awareness on gender responsiveness and mobilize communities around gender equality issues
4. Identify and invest in the career advancement and leadership of women colleagues, including through leadership training and mentorship programmes as well as recruitment targets and organizational culture
5. Strive for gender parity in all panels and discussions by engaging with organizers to make the necessary changes to ensure gender balance, including reaching out to additional experts
6. Advocate strong wording on gender equality and women’s empowerment tailored to the subject under consideration in resolutions, statements and side events
7. Disseminate information on intergovernmental commitments, initiatives and best practices on promoting gender equality, women’s participation and gender balance to colleagues, staff and in their capitals, and work towards their implementation
8. Make a public commitment by joining the International Gender Champions and other informal groups of gender-equality advocates, such as the Group of Friends for Gender Parity



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INTRODUCTION

For the principles of human rights, democracy and justice to be realized, women must be able to fully and equally participate in all areas of decision-making. Their right to participation is anchored in international agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Although working for gender equality is the responsibility of both male and female policymakers, **a focus on women's participation and leadership in decision-making processes has shown to lead to policy reforms that advance gender equality and the rights and interests of women and girls.** The advocacy efforts of women have led to constitutional and legal reforms to improve women's political participation in Kenya, Morocco, Colombia and many other countries. Moreover, a comparative study of 70 countries over 40 years recognized the role of women's organizations as the most critical factor in the implementation of gender-equality policies and in advancing women's rights.<sup>4</sup> Yet women remain underrepresented in politics, business and finance, science and technology, security and other fields, especially at the highest levels.

To achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Governments, United Nations system entities and other international organizations, as well as civil society and the private sector, are all expected to take action to achieve gender equality and promote women's participation and leadership in all spheres and at all levels. In this context, leaders of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, as well as heads of other international organizations, civil society organizations and permanent missions to the United Nations, established in September 2015 a network of International Gender Champions committed to making real progress towards gender equality. The network operates through a number of "impact groups", including one that has looked closely at women's participation in delegations to governing bodies.

In 2016, the United Nations Governing Bodies Secretariat decided to put gender balance in governing bodies of international organizations on the agenda of its annual meeting. With a view to providing systematic guidance to all governing bodies to promote women's participation and advance the goal of gender balance across their conferences and meetings, the members recommended a number of actions, including raising awareness and sharing information on the importance of women's participation; organizing training sessions for women delegates; tracking the number of women and men participating in governing body meetings, including as Chairs; and publishing information on women's and men's participation in governing bodies of United Nations entities and in major conferences.

This publication aims to build knowledge on women's representation in national delegations to meetings of the United Nations and of other international organizations' governing bodies and their leadership roles in these meetings. It is based in part on responses to a questionnaire sent in October 2016 to members of the United Nations Governing Bodies Secretariat and of the International Gender Champions–Geneva to assess women's participation in different intergovernmental processes. The survey sought input on the various policies and strategies that agencies use to track and improve women's participation in their processes. Although the results of the survey may not be representative of all United Nations organizations, they have yielded important information on the current policies and practices in the 23 entities that participated.<sup>5</sup> Information was also drawn from previous UN-Women reports and studies and other publicly available sources.

4 Mala Htun and Laurel Weldon, "The civic origins of progressive policy change: combating violence against women in global perspectives 1975-2005", *American Political Science Review*, vol. 106, No. 3 (2012).

5 The entities that responded to the survey are the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the International Trade Centre (ITC), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). Although not within the United Nations system, IPU was invited to participate because it cooperates closely with several United Nations agencies, including in the framework of the International Gender Champions, and its far-reaching policies and practices are of interest and relevance to this publication.

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The publication sets the context by outlining existing intergovernmental and inter-agency frameworks and then reviews trends in women’s participation in national Governments and intergovernmental forums. It highlights best practices in promoting women’s participation at different levels – national and multilateral – and provides a set of recommendations to increase the participation of women in meetings of the United Nations and of other international organizations’ governing bodies. It is intended to be used as an education and advocacy tool to promote gender parity in delegations and international decision-making. It can empower a wide range of gender champions to advocate gender equality and gender balance across their networks.



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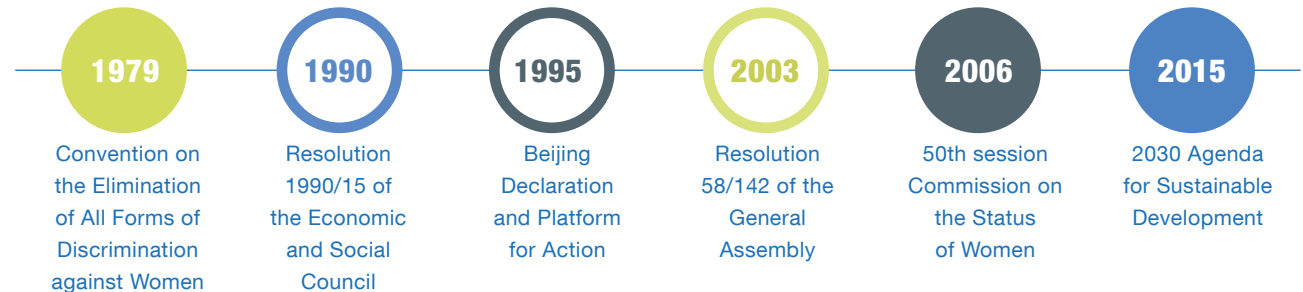
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## I. EXISTING FRAMEWORKS AND MECHANISMS FOR WOMEN'S FULL AND EQUAL PARTICIPATION IN UNITED NATIONS GOVERNING BODIES AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL PROCESSES

### A. Normative frameworks



The strong commitments of countries to women's equal participation at all levels of decision-making are reflected across several significant international agreements. The 1979 [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#), considered the "international bill of rights for women", urges States Parties to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life and to ensure to women the equal opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and participate in the work of international organizations (arts. 7-8). The [1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) – recognizing women's full participation as fundamental to equality, development and peace – identifies "women in power and decision-making" as one of twelve critical areas of concern and calls on governmental bodies to commit to establishing the goal of gender balance.

The General Assembly, in its [resolution 58/142](#), urged States to promote gender balance for their delegations to United Nations and other international meetings and conferences. Among its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) has a stand-alone goal on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (Goal 5), which includes a specific target on ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life (target 5.5). These commitments were reinforced in other intergovernmental outcome documents adopted in 2015, such as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

To give effect to these commitments to women's full and equal participation, the existing normative frameworks include calls for special measures, specific targets and capacity-building activities. The importance of temporary special measures is reiterated in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, General Assembly resolution 66/130 and the agreed conclusions of the fiftieth and subsequent sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women.<sup>6</sup> Temporary special measures may be legislative, executive, administrative and other regulatory instruments, policies and practices, such as (a) outreach or support programmes; (b) allocation and/or reallocation of resources; (c) preferential treatment; (d) targeted recruitment, hiring and promotion; (e) numerical goals connected with time frames; and (f) quota systems.<sup>7</sup>

The Beijing Platform for Action, in particular, calls on governmental bodies to use [specific targets](#) and various measures to achieve equal representation and aim at gender balance in lists of candidates for election and appointments to United Nations organizations (particularly senior posts) and in the compositions of delegations to the United Nations and other international forums.<sup>8</sup> Already in 1990, the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1990/15, had called on Governments and other political actors to each aim at targets of at least 30 per cent women in leadership positions by 1995, with a view to achieving equal representation by the year 2000 (annex, para. 7). To this end, both resolution 1990/15

<sup>6</sup> At its fiftieth session, the Commission on the Status of Women considered the priority themes "enhanced participation of women in development" and "equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels" (E/2006/27).

<sup>7</sup> See Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, general recommendation No. 25 (2004) on temporary special measures, para. 22.

<sup>8</sup> See *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II, paras. 190 and 192 (i).

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and the Beijing Platform for Action highlight the need for capacity-building, calling for recruitment and training programmes to prepare women for leadership positions, as well as skills and leadership training and mentoring support (particularly to women with disabilities or belonging to racial or ethnic minorities). The 20-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action in 2015 further emphasized the need for greater efforts to dismantle the barriers to women's participation in decision-making, including the **discriminatory culture of political institutions, financial constraints, the lack of family-friendly provisions and threats of violence and intimidation**.<sup>9</sup>

These international agreements demonstrate the importance of continuing to prioritize gender equality and women's empowerment to build the path to sustainable development. As countries implement these global commitments, the existing frameworks must be strengthened to ensure sustained progress for the rights and interests of women and girls all over the world.

B. The United Nations System-wide Action Plan

Created to mainstream a gender perspective throughout the United Nations system, the **United Nations System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP)** on gender equality and women's empowerment provides an example of **an overarching accountability framework that involves reporting on progress in gender mainstreaming in all institutional functions**. Over 90 per cent of United Nations entities currently apply UN-SWAP. They report on 15 performance indicators and are expected to meet or exceed the requirements for all indicators by the 2017 deadline.

The indicator on gender architecture and parity remains a particular challenge across the United Nations system, however. The indicator has three components: (a) gender focal point systems; (b) equal representation of women at all levels; and (c) adequate resourcing. Between the establishment of UN-SWAP in 2012 and 2015, the number of entities that reached or exceeded the requirements for this indicator doubled from 7 to 14 (i.e., up from 13 to 22 per cent).<sup>10</sup>

Progress towards achieving equal representation of women across the United Nations system remains slow. The lessons learned from reporting through UN-SWAP show that without intensified efforts and appropriate human and financial investments in this area, as well as in others such as organizational culture and resource allocation, the overall rate of progress in women's participation will stagnate or decline.<sup>11</sup>

II. THE STATE OF PLAY: OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DECISION-MAKING

Despite the clear imperative outlined in these instruments for Governments to strive for gender balance both in their national bodies and in intergovernmental meetings, progress for women remained unacceptably slow between 1995 and 2015, with areas of stagnation and even regression. Persisting imbalances in men's and women's participation in international and national decision-making processes, particularly in senior positions, must be addressed urgently.

Established evidence reveals that women's participation improves political decision-making and can contribute to the formulation and implementation of policies and strategies that better respond to the rights and interests of women and girls. Women demonstrate leadership by working across party lines through women's caucuses and by taking action on issues of gender equality, including the elimination of gender-based violence, parental leave and childcare, as well as gender-equality laws and electoral reform.<sup>12</sup> Women's participation in United Nations-led peace processes has also been correlated with a greater likelihood of agreements being reached and implemented. Similarly, peace agreements brokered with the involvement of women are more likely to be gender-responsive, sustainable, enhance civil society participation and ensure broader community acceptance.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> E/CN.6/2015/3, para. 397; see also para. 393.

<sup>10</sup> E/2016/57.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> IPU, *Equality in Politics: A Survey of Men and Women in Parliaments* (Geneva, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325* (UN-Women, 2015).

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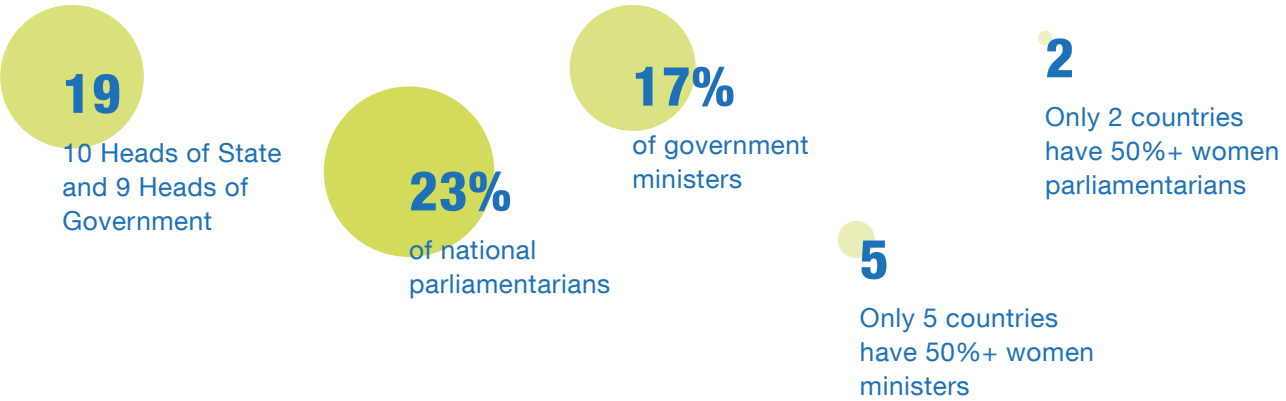
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Notwithstanding the incremental gains made in their overall numbers in political positions, **women are still significantly underrepresented at the highest levels of government, as well as across the public and private sectors.** Figure I portrays the state of women in positions of power at the national level as of 2015.

Figure I: Women in national Governments



Sources: UN-Women and IPU data, available from [www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures](http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures) and [www.ipu.org/press-e/pressrelease201503101.htm](http://www.ipu.org/press-e/pressrelease201503101.htm) (accessed 18 January 2017).

The average percentage of women in national parliaments worldwide has remained disappointingly low at 23 per cent. Two countries have over 50 per cent women in parliament and 46 countries have 30 per cent or more women in their single or lower houses of parliament.<sup>14</sup> Women are still underrepresented in effective political decision-making in many countries, with women accounting for less than ten per cent of members in over 50 lower and upper houses and several chambers being exclusively male.<sup>15</sup>

At 17 per cent, women government ministers are even rarer. Four of the five countries where women held at least 50 per cent of ministerial positions in 2015 are in Europe (Finland, France, Liechtenstein and Sweden) and the fifth is in Africa (Cabo Verde). Only 30 countries had 30 per cent or more women ministers, while 46 countries had less than ten per cent. Eight countries had no women ministers at all. In addition, the majority of women ministers had social portfolios, such as family, education or culture, while defence, finance or economic portfolios were the least likely to be held by women ministers.<sup>16</sup>

Some countries<sup>17</sup> have taken various measures to increase women’s participation, including temporary special measures and awareness-raising campaigns to improve access for women and educate parties and constituents on gender responsiveness. In most cases, however, women face multiple hurdles to full and effective participation, including discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes, threats of violence and intimidation, lack of information and educational opportunities, limited financing and resources, and disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, inherent gender bias shape the functioning of political institutions as reflected in incumbency rules and old boys’ networks.<sup>19</sup> Organizations also often lack comprehensive policies to address family planning and childcare, work-life balance and their organizational culture, which are all based on male models of conduct.

14 UN-Women, “Facts and figures: Leadership and political participation”. Available from [www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures](http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures) (accessed 18 January 2017).  
15 IPU, “Women in parliament in 2015: the year in review”, p. 2.  
16 IPU and UN-Women, “Women in Politics: 2015 map”.  
17 See national reports for the 20-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, for instance those of Slovenia and South Africa. Available from [http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/59/national\\_reviews/slovenia\\_review\\_beijing20.ashx?v=1&d=20140917T100731](http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/59/national_reviews/slovenia_review_beijing20.ashx?v=1&d=20140917T100731) and [http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/59/national\\_reviews/south\\_africa\\_review\\_beijing20.ashx?v=1&d=20140917T100727](http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/59/national_reviews/south_africa_review_beijing20.ashx?v=1&d=20140917T100727) (accessed 18 January 2017).  
18 UN-Women and Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice, “The full view”.  
19 E/CN.6/2015/3, para. 216.

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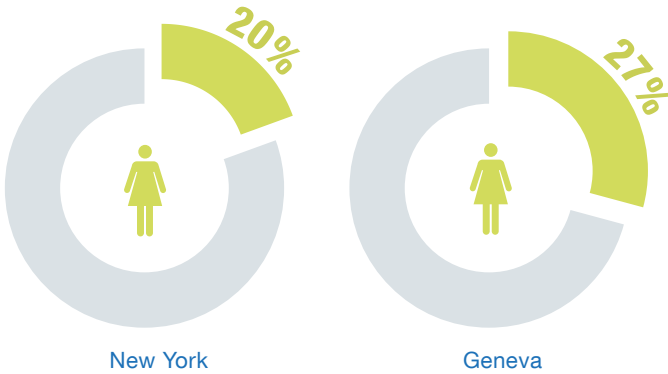
The unequal participation of women at the national level, particularly in senior positions, translates into a gender imbalance at the international level and a limited visibility of women at high-level conferences. Reflecting women’s underrepresentation in ministerial positions, government delegations rarely comprise equal numbers of women and men, and heads of delegations are predominantly men.

At the United Nations, only three women have served as President in the 71 sessions held by the General Assembly so far. At the general debate of the seventy-first session, in 2016, one of the most high-level events at the United Nations attended by Heads of State and Government, only 18 of the 197 statements were given by women (compared to 22 in 2015 and 13 in 2014).<sup>20</sup> Only two women have so far served as President of the Economic and Social Council.

The chairing of the six Main Committees of the General Assembly, which discuss the substantive items on its agenda, further demonstrates the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles at the United Nations. Only one woman has ever served as Chair of the First Committee (Disarmament and International Security); four for the Second (Economic and Financial) Committee; sixteen for the Third (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) Committee; three for the Fourth (Special Political and Decolonization) Committee; and two for the Fifth (Administrative and Budgetary) Committee.<sup>21</sup> The relatively higher number of women Chairs of the Third Committee again illustrates that patterns seen at the national level with women ministers overseeing “social” portfolios, rather than more financial or security-related portfolios, also apply at the global level.

Within the permanent missions to the United Nations, there is a lack of women at the senior level as well. According to the Liaison and Protocol Service, only 38 of the 187 permanent representatives to the United Nations in New York, i.e., around 20 per cent, were women in June 2016. That percentage is slightly below the global average of women in national parliaments. The highest number of women permanent representatives in New York was 40, reached in July 2015. In December 2016, 27 per cent of the 156 permanent representatives to the United Nations in Geneva and 35 per cent of the total diplomatic staff in permanent missions in Geneva were women.

Figure II: Gender representation among permanent representatives to the United Nations in 2016



<sup>20</sup> PeaceWomen – Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom data available from [www.peacewomen.org](http://www.peacewomen.org) (accessed 18 January 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Group of Friends for Gender Parity, HERstory Exhibit at United Nations Headquarters, New York, 12-23 December 2016. No information provided for the Sixth (Legal) Committee.



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This underrepresentation of women in ambassadorial or senior positions leads to a lack of women at high-level intergovernmental meetings, including at Security Council debates. In the 49 meetings<sup>22</sup> that the Security Council held between 1 October and 13 December 2016, only one to three members (of a total of 15) were represented by women, with five meetings having no women take part at all.

Figure III: Group photo with the representatives of members of the Security Council and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in December 2016



Source: UN Photo/Evan Schneider.

The participation of women in meetings of the governing bodies of many organizations has stagnated at around 30 per cent. At the 105th session of the International Labour Conference (May–June 2016), 31.9 per cent of government titular delegates were women (compared to 28.4 per cent in 2015 and 27.4 in 2014).<sup>23</sup> Although this represents a significant increase over the 2012 figure of 23 per cent, there is no longer a notable increase. The proportion of women in workers’ and employers’ delegations was even lower. Women’s participation in the 2015 Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change stood at 32 per cent, with only 20 per cent as heads of delegation, and 41–42 per cent for other governing bodies.<sup>24</sup> The 2015 World Meteorological Congress had 27 per cent women, with only 16 per cent as principal delegates, and the ITU 2014 Plenipotentiary Conference had 23.6 per cent women delegates,<sup>25</sup> while its 2016 Council meetings had 28.5 per cent women. At the 135th IPU Assembly (October 2016), 33.3 per cent of delegates were women, which is the highest number ever.<sup>26</sup>

Although women’s participation in many processes usually ranges around 25–35 per cent, some entities are nearing gender parity. The Executive Board of UNESCO had 48 per cent women (28 out of 58) in 2013–2015 (but this number declined to 34 per cent in 2015–2017). WFP, which began tracking women’s participation in all informal consultations following the meeting of the United Nations Governing Bodies Secretariat in July 2016, found that it averaged 45 per cent. In 2015, 47 per cent of participants at the World Health Assembly and 48.5 per cent at the WIPO Assemblies were women. With the exception of WIPO, these organizations deal with “social” issues (education, food and health, respectively), domains where women have traditionally been better represented.

<sup>22</sup> Meetings for which meeting records were available.

<sup>23</sup> ILO, “Gender balance in the International Labour Conference: statistics on the representation of women and men in the ILC (2010–2016)”, November 2016.

<sup>24</sup> FCCC/CP/2016/4, table 3.

<sup>25</sup> ITU data available from [www.itu.int/en/action/gender-equality/Pages/itu-negotiation-table.aspx](http://www.itu.int/en/action/gender-equality/Pages/itu-negotiation-table.aspx) (accessed 18 January 2017).

<sup>26</sup> IPU data available from [www.ipu.org/wmn-e/dlgtns.htm](http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/dlgtns.htm) (accessed 18 January 2017).



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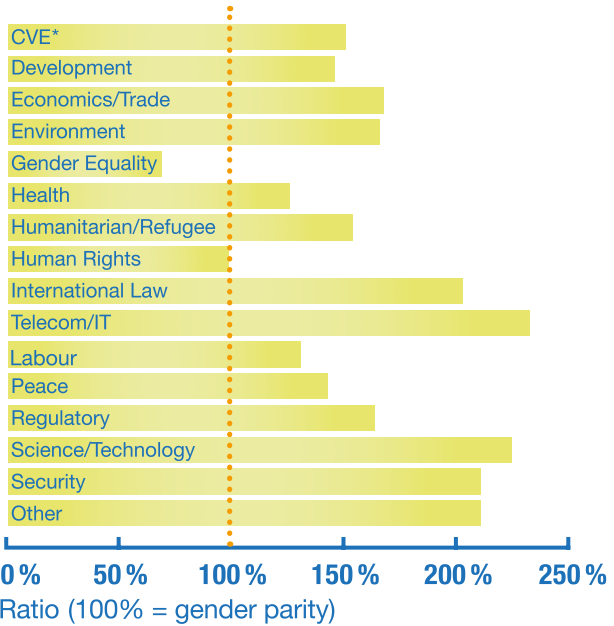
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Women also remain underrepresented on panels, especially those on technical and security-related topics, signifying that they continue to face challenges in gaining recognition for their expertise. Sixty-eight respondents to the annual survey conducted by the International Gender Champions provided information on the gender ratios of 472 panels on which they had been invited to participate. The average panel consisted of 2.5 female and 3.75 male panellists. In other words, men were, on average, 50 per cent better represented than women. Women remained particularly underrepresented on certain panels, with more than twice as many men on panels on telecom/IT, science/technology, security and international law. In contrast, panels on gender equality had significantly fewer men than women. In 42 per cent of the cases gender champions requested changes to the gender balance of the 472 panels in which they participated. These interventions were successful 84 per cent of the time, demonstrating that political will and active engagement to promote gender balance can lead to positive change.<sup>27</sup>

Figure IV: Gender ratio (male/female) by panel theme



\* Countering violent extremism.

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Several of the organizations that responded to the survey conducted in preparation for this report highlighted their policies and strategies to promote gender balance in the meetings of their governing bodies and expressed interest in learning good practices from others. The survey results show that **many international entities have pursued similar approaches to encourage women's participation**. Measures that have proven to be effective and the lessons learned from these experiences highlight the importance of (a) explicit policies and mandated targets, (b) tracking and reporting, (c) training and capacity-building, (d) financial support, (e) advocacy and networking, and (f) communication strategies.



<sup>27</sup> International Gender Champions—Geneva, “Annual report 2016”.

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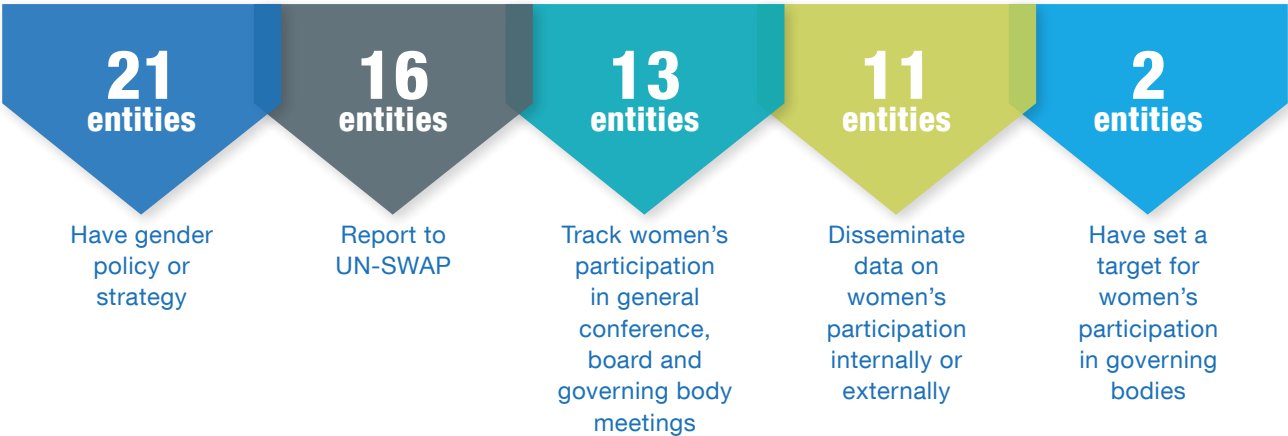
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A. Explicit policies and mandated targets

As shown in figure V, nearly all of the 23 responding organizations indicated that their governing bodies had adopted gender policies or strategies. However, and despite evidence of the importance of setting goals and measurable targets that are both realistic and ambitious, **few include specific measures or guidance to advance gender balance.** Among the respondents, only WMO and IPU have set a specific target – 30 per cent – for women’s participation in the meetings of their governing bodies. Moreover, **few entities have gathered or disseminated sex-disaggregated data** on participants at the conferences and meetings of their governing bodies.

Figure V: Actions taken by organizations to advance gender balance



Women’s participation in more technical organizations has remained a challenge, leading to the adoption of several decisions. The low number of women in the WMO Congress and Executive Council has been attributed to the low number of women permanent representatives with WMO globally. Women’s participation in the WMO Congress has edged up from 20 per cent in 2011 (when the WMO Policy on Gender Mainstreaming was adopted) to 24 per cent in 2014 and 27 per cent in 2015. Women’s participation in the Executive Council was 0–3 per cent from 2000 to 2006, rose to 14 per cent in 2013, but fell back to 11 per cent in 2014.<sup>28</sup> In 2015, the WMO Congress, in its resolution 59 (Cg-17) on gender equality and empowerment of women, urged its members to increase the representation of women in their delegations to constituent body meetings and to nominate more women candidates for technical commissions and other bodies as well as for training and fellowships. The resolution updated the WMO Gender Equality Policy to further stipulate that technical commissions and regional associations should make efforts to **ensure at least 30 per cent of the members of their working structures are women**, with this percentage increasing progressively within each financial period, with a longer-term objective of reaching parity. The WMO Congress further called on policymaking organs, constituent bodies and top-level management to provide visible support, accountability and transparency to ensure gender equality.

In IPU, mandatory quotas have proven effective in boosting the participation of women in IPU Assemblies and decision-making bodies, and it is expected that IPU will continue to increase existing quotas. Its statutes and rules set a 20 per cent quota for women for its Executive Committee (expected to rise to 30 per cent in 2017), while targets or quotas for all other bodies range from 30 to 50 per cent for both sexes. These quotas also apply to geopolitical group representatives of certain bodies. For example, not more than two of the three members of each geopolitical group represented on each Standing Committee Bureau can be of the same sex.<sup>29</sup> For the bodies on international humanitarian law and young parliamentarians, each geopolitical group must be represented by one woman and one man.<sup>30</sup> The use of such quotas has enabled many bodies to approach or maintain gender balance since 2014.

<sup>28</sup> WMO, “Progress report on implementation of the WMO Policy on Gender Mainstreaming”.

<sup>29</sup> Rules of the Standing Committees, rule 7.1.

<sup>30</sup> See Rules of the Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law, rule 2.2, and Rules and working modalities of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians of the IPU, rule 5.3.

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Also within IPU, enforcement measures for single-sex delegations to its Governing Council and Assembly, such as reductions in the number of delegates or votes, have promoted accountability. Delegations to IPU Assemblies are notified when registering that they **must include at least one man and one woman or be subject to sanctions, such as reduced voting rights** in the IPU Governing Council, where each delegation is entitled to three votes but would have only two if it failed to meet the quota. IPU also holds hearings with delegations from parliaments with no or few women in order to promote gender equality and identify avenues for future IPU support to improve women's participation. The agenda for its Assembly also incorporates an increasing number of items related to gender equality.

The International Labour Conference, in its resolutions VIII of 1975 and XI of 1981, called on States to ensure the appointment of women to delegations on the same basis and by the same standards as men and to secure the widest possible participation of women at the Conference. This call was extended to the delegations of employers' and workers' organizations in 1991. In its resolution III of 2009, it called on ILO to improve, through concrete measures, women's participation at all levels in all ILO meetings, including the Governing Body and the International Labour Conference. In his closing remarks at the ninety-eighth session (2009), the Director-General of ILO challenged State delegations to achieve 35 per cent female participation by 2010. The responses to a 2011 survey of gender-balanced delegations conducted by ILO **highlighted gender-equality policies, including quotas for national elections, gender action plans and compliance audits as good practices used by Governments.**

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which began as a gender-blind process, also shows how adopting specific goals and policies can improve women's participation. The goal of gender balance was affirmed through decision 23/CP.18 in 2012. Between that year and 2016, women delegates accounted for 29 to 41 per cent of government delegates to the sessions of the governing bodies. Since the first gender-related decision in 2001, women's participation in the Convention's process, including in the bureaux and bodies and in delegations, has gradually improved due to several decisions promoting women's participation and gender balance, including a **work programme on gender** in 2014. The work programme was extended and enhanced in 2016 to include a gender action plan and more detailed reporting.

B. Tracking and reporting

Tracking and reporting on women's representation on governing bodies is an essential first step in identifying gender dynamics in bodies and institutions and ensuring informed policymaking and actions. To this end, the **collection, analysis and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data are vital.** Disaggregated data must be easily accessible to the public and regularly updated as they allow Governments, civil society and other stakeholders to effectively monitor and evaluate progress in women's participation and extrapolate the factors that enable, or hinder, progress.

Of the entities that track women's participation, most do so only during their annual meetings or general conferences. Only three respondents track during other decision-making meetings as well, such as those of their executive board or other governing body meetings.

The indicators used for tracking also vary. Of the indicators listed in the survey (see fig. VI), most entities did not track any or tracked only one or two. Only one entity, UNICEF, indicated that it tracked nearly all of the indicators for its Executive Board's meetings (although this information is not public), while four other entities tracked around half the indicators.

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Figure VI: Tracking women's participation in meetings (survey responses)

Tracking	Entities
Composition, by sex, of bodies created to support the work of the intergovernmental body	2
Percentage of women as Chairs	3
Women's interventions in general	2
Women's interventions on specific agenda items	2
Percentage of women at ministerial or Head of State level participating in the governing bodies	1
Number of women as heads or deputy heads of delegation	3
Percentage of women panellists in side events	4
Women as facilitators / co-facilitators (for example in negotiating groups, if applicable)	2
Other	4

Recognizing that the public dissemination of data on women's participation is key to encouraging delegations to comply and improve, several organizations have published this information on their websites and issued progress reports to demonstrate recent trends and ongoing strategies. Five entities make data on women's participation public, while six disseminate this information internally. The former are ILO, IPU, ITU, the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and WMO.<sup>31</sup>

The WMO Gender Equality Policy specifies that "sex-disaggregated data will be collected on all aspects of WMO work, including membership in constituent body structures" (para. 9.1). In 2013, WMO developed a set of monitoring indicators to track the implementation of its Policy on Gender Mainstreaming, which contains a framework for action and envisions regular monitoring. To collect baseline data, WMO used statistical information on gender balance in all its governance structures and women's participation in sessions of constituent bodies, which was supplemented by information collected from members.

ILO reports on the proportion of women and men accredited in its Conference delegations of Governments, employers and workers. The Director-General of ILO also invites States to periodically report on any measures taken to send gender-balanced delegations to sessions of the International Labour Conference and to regional meetings, as well as on any obstacles encountered and actions proven useful in achieving gender parity. In 2012, the Governing Body requested more [detailed reporting on women's participation](#), establishing a reporting mechanism whereby the Director-General contacts those States that did not meet the 30 per cent target in their delegations.

ITU publishes in an online gender dashboard the number of women in governing body meetings and as Chairs or Vice-Chairs of meetings. The secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change publishes reports on the gender composition of delegations and all bodies every year. IPU publishes data on the gender composition of all bodies on its website and shares sex-disaggregated data analyses with the IPU Gender Partnership Group, which is composed of two women and two men of the Executive Committee. The Gender Partnership Group reports publicly on women's representation in Assemblies, including by naming countries that have been sanctioned for failing to abide by the gender-related rules of IPU.

31 See [www.ilo.org/gender/Informationresources/WCMS\\_535124/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/gender/Informationresources/WCMS_535124/lang--en/index.htm); [www.ipu.org/wmne/dlgtns.htm](http://www.ipu.org/wmne/dlgtns.htm); [www.itu.int/en/action/gender-equality/Pages/itu-negotiation-table.aspx](http://www.itu.int/en/action/gender-equality/Pages/itu-negotiation-table.aspx); [unfccc.int/gender\\_and\\_climate\\_change/items/9396.php](http://unfccc.int/gender_and_climate_change/items/9396.php) (see annual reports on gender composition); <https://public.wmo.int/en/resources/gender-equality> (see Progress Report) (accessed 18 January 2017).



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##### B. Women in international processes

#### III. A GROWING REALIZATION THAT "BUSINESS AS USUAL" IS NO LONGER AN OPTION

##### A. Explicit policies and mandated targets

##### B. Tracking and reporting

##### C. Training and capacity-building

##### D. Financial support

##### E. Advocacy and networking

##### F. Communications strategies and other approaches

To accelerate progress towards gender balance in international decision-making bodies and processes, strong political will at the highest level, and in particular from ministers who decide on the composition of delegations, is essential, as are targeted actions to track and report on the participation of women.

### C. Training and capacity-building

Many organizations have stressed the importance of awareness-raising and capacity-building as important steps to promote gender balance in delegations. The secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has emphasized that capacity-building, training and education are often most effective when they take into account the needs of delegates and address specific cultural, structural and other contextual aspects. Several organizations have offered **panels and training on gender equality**, including ILO and ITU. The latter organized **workshops on leadership and negotiation skills for women delegates**.

Launched in 2015, the inter-agency Women's Leadership Programme, led by UNITAR, works with UN-Women and across the United Nations system to build the knowledge, skills and capacities of government delegates. It seeks to address the gender imbalance in delegations to conferences and promote gender equality and women's full and effective participation and leadership at all levels of political life. In 2016–2017, the Programme aims to deliver training and awareness-raising activities to over 500 government officials, building skills in leadership, negotiation, chairmanship and effective communication. Since its inception, the Programme has held workshops for women delegates in both Geneva and New York, and facilitated regular **awareness-raising and networking events**. One of the biggest constraints in sustaining capacity-building initiatives like the Women's Leadership Programme is financial, as most often their funding is ad hoc and extrabudgetary. They are not financed by core or regular organization budgets. This poses a challenge in ensuring the continuity of training and follow-up training, which are essential in building the capacity of women delegates to develop their expertise, especially in so-called technical fields, where women officials at the national level may not be afforded the same exposure to the issues as their male counterparts.

OHCHR has used gender training opportunities to encourage Member States to take various steps to improve women's participation in sessions of the Human Rights Council and its subsidiary bodies, including among the mandate holders of its special procedures and its other subsidiary mechanisms. OHCHR and the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva also organize a yearly training of the Council's diplomats on the international frameworks on women's human rights, which includes a presentation of data on gender balance among delegates and panellists of the Council's panel discussions. The data include the proportion of women delegates, of women speakers on panels and of women taking the floor.

### D. Financial support

**Lack of funding for capacity-building, training and travel can often hold women back from participating in decision-making processes.** Dedicated financial resources to facilitate the engagement of women delegates is therefore essential to achieve gender balance in international forums.

In the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Women Delegates Fund is a well-known example of good practice to increase the number of women in delegations. It aims to promote women's leadership in climate change decision-making by providing travel support, capacity-building and networking opportunities to women, particularly from least developed countries, so as to enable them to be part of their national delegations for the Convention. The Fund is operated outside of the Convention's secretariat, however, and is dependent on the funding it receives from donors, such as Finland, Iceland and the Netherlands.

In selecting a limited number of experts from developing and least developed countries to be funded so they can take part in its meetings, UNCTAD gives preference to women experts who meet all the criteria for funding. Most entities, however, do not apply such a gender criterion and fund the delegates appointed by their member States.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### THE WAY FORWARD: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

In their efforts to increase the participation of women, Member States should consider the following measures:

The secretariats of United Nations governing bodies can provide support to Member States by taking the following actions:

Ministers, ambassadors, heads of organizations and other senior officials – both women and men – should consider taking the following actions:

## INTRODUCTION

### I. EXISTING FRAMEWORKS AND MECHANISMS FOR WOMEN'S FULL AND EQUAL PARTICIPATION IN UNITED NATIONS GOVERNING BODIES AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL PROCESSES

#### A. Normative frameworks

#### B. The United Nations System-wide Action Plan

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### E. Advocacy and networking

There are several mechanisms and platforms to advocate gender equality and provide opportunities for networking and information-sharing and they have proven effective in raising awareness on the importance of gender parity. Women ambassadors to the United Nations in New York and Geneva, sometimes involving male gender-equality advocates as well, have formed **networks or informal groups, meeting regularly to strategize** on how to pursue and promote gender issues in their work and in the exercise of their functions. Former United States Permanent Representative Madeleine Albright has spoken of regular gatherings she had with the only six other women ambassadors (of 183 permanent representatives) during her tenure as Secretary of State in 1993-1997.<sup>32</sup> While the numbers have since improved somewhat (see chap. II.B), interested permanent representatives continue to gather in various formats to push for real change. The Group of Friends for Gender Parity, for example, is a coalition of over 60 like-minded Member States committed to advocating gender parity in the United Nations in New York.

Most notably, the **International Gender Champions**, a network of senior leaders, including permanent representatives, permanent observers, heads of United Nations agencies and other international organizations, and leaders from civil society and the private sector, serves as a model for the diplomatic communities in multilateral hubs. It has fast expanded since its inception in Geneva in 2015, reaching over 120 Champions a year later. A New York chapter of the initiative will be officially launched in March 2017. Gender Champions sign the "Panel Parity Pledge", committing to strive for gender parity in all panels and discussions, and make two additional commitments focused on advancing gender equality, either in the executive management or in the programmatic work of their organizations. Gender Champions must also profile the initiative on their organizations' websites and report results at the end of each year. While the initiative initially highlighted women's representation on panel discussions, it has also focused some of its work on improving gender balance in delegations participating in governing bodies. **The cross-sectoral nature of the network has allowed secretariats and permanent missions to discuss frankly some of the challenges** involved in ensuring more balanced delegations.

Processes under the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change and WMO dedicate one day of their conferences to gender equality, featuring a series of events and panels focusing on women's initiatives and contributions, and discussing strategies to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment.

In addition to its quotas and sanctions structure, IPU has a dedicated women's platform called the Forum of Women Parliamentarians that meets at every assembly.

### F. Communications strategies and other approaches

Clear channels of communication between United Nations entities and Member States, as well as among United Nations entities, can help ensure all parties have the **information needed to develop, implement and monitor policies and plans** to enhance women's participation and achieve gender balance. In its notifications to Parties regarding elections and nominations for positions on constituted bodies, the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change makes reference to the goal of gender balance. The webpage on election and membership also refers prominently to decisions on gender balance and increasing the participation of women. In their invitations to governing bodies' meetings addressed to States, some entities, such as ITU, WHO and WMO, encourage the nomination of women in delegations. Often, they make reference to specific resolutions encouraging women's participation.

UNIDO has developed a list of recommended actions to promote women's participation at its General Conference's side events: (a) as part of the planning process, request organizers to report on gender balance of the panels; (b) develop a shortlist of women moderators for future events; (c) request equal numbers of men and women to be invited as panellists; (d) formally track male and female participation; (e) develop a list of qualified women for different thematic areas; and (f) include video messages of female speakers where gender balance cannot be reached.

All of the measures, initiatives and platforms mentioned above provide a range of good practices and lessons learned in the context of promoting gender balance in the programmatic work and governing structures of intergovernmental organizations. They also promote and provide valuable information on opportunities and resources.

<sup>32</sup> See [https://www.ted.com/talks/madeleine\\_albright\\_on\\_being\\_a\\_woman\\_and\\_a\\_diplomat/transcript?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/madeleine_albright_on_being_a_woman_and_a_diplomat/transcript?language=en) (accessed 18 January 2017).

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(c) IGC and UN-Women