

THEMATIC STRATEGY PAPER

# SHAPING THE INTERNATIONAL AGENDA II:

## Progress on raising women's voices in intergovernmental forums



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report, *Shaping the international agenda II: Progress on raising women's voices in intergovernmental forums*, is based on the responses of 30 members of the United Nations Governing Bodies Secretariats (UNGBS) to the survey circulated in February 2020 via SurveyMonkey. It updates the findings and recommendations of the first edition.

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) acknowledges with appreciation the 30 entities that responded to the survey:

European Space Agency (ESA); Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO); International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD); International Labour Organization (ILO); International Maritime Organization (IMO); International Telecommunication Union (ITU); Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); Department for General Assembly and Conference Management - United Nations (DGACM); United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO); United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC); United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC); UN Women; Universal Postal Union (UPU); World Food Programme (WFP); Secretariat of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC Secretariat); World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO); World Meteorological Organization (WMO); World Bank; World Trade Organization (WTO).

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The views expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of UN Women, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.

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**UN WOMEN**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women’s full and equal participation in all decision-making processes is necessary to achieve gender equality and drive progress towards sustainable development. In 2017, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the International Gender Champions–Geneva published *Shaping the international agenda: Raising women’s voices in intergovernmental forums*<sup>1</sup> (hereinafter referred to as *Shaping the international agenda*) to empower a wide range of gender champions and stakeholders in advancing gender equality and parity in intergovernmental processes. Since its publication, it has served as a useful tool to raise awareness and promote gender parity in intergovernmental bodies and processes. For example, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution that “encourages Member States to seek gender balance in the distribution of the Chairs and bureau members of the Main Committees as well as the Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly, where applicable.”<sup>2</sup>

In 2020, the international community commemorated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA). Women’s equal access to and full participation in decision-making processes was one of the 12 critical areas of concern of the BPfA, which urged governments and stakeholders to “aim at and support gender balance in the composition of delegations to the United Nations and other international forums.”<sup>3</sup>

Gender equality, the rights of women and girls and their empowerment are critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Within the United Nations system, the United Nations Secretary-General has made gender equality and parity one of his top priorities, with the roll-out of the [Secretary-General’s System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity](#),<sup>4</sup> the launch of [Enabling Environment Guidelines for the United Nations System](#),<sup>5</sup> and the publication of the [Code of Conduct to Prevent Harassment, including Sexual Harassment, at UN System Events](#).<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, United Nations Member States have underlined the

importance of accelerating efforts to reach gender parity through the recommendations of the System-wide Strategy and Enabling Environment Guidelines.<sup>7</sup>

The second edition of *Shaping the international agenda* updates the findings and recommendations based on survey responses received from members of the United Nations Governing Bodies Secretariat (UNGBS) in 2020. The survey results demonstrate progress made by the secretariats of the United Nations governing bodies on implementing actions under seven categories of recommendations: (i) explicit policies and mandated targets; (ii) tracking and reporting; (iii) training and capacity-building; (iv) financial support; (v) advocacy and networking; (vi) communications strategies; and, a new area of focus since the previous report, (vii) initiatives addressing sexual misconduct. The results highlight examples of good practice by members of the UNGBS, and areas where further work is needed.

As in *Shaping the international agenda*, this report concludes with recommendations to further enhance gender parity goals directed at three important groups of actors: the UNGBS; Member States of the United Nations; and ministers, ambassadors, heads of organizations and other senior officials.

A knowledge product and an advocacy tool, this report is intended to raise awareness, share lessons and inspire others to commit to action that improves and strengthens women’s participation, which is critical to shaping an inclusive international agenda.

1 Available from the digital library of the UN Women website ([www.unwomen.org/](http://www.unwomen.org/)).

2 A/RES/71/323, para. 44.

3 Para. 192 (i).

4 2017. Available from the United Nations Gender Parity website ([www.un.org/gender/](http://www.un.org/gender/)).

5 UN Women, 2019. [www.unwomen.org/-/media/head-quarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2019/gender-parity-enabling-environment-guidelines-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1535](http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/head-quarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2019/gender-parity-enabling-environment-guidelines-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1535).

6 United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), 2019. Available from the United Nations System Code of Conduct website ([www.un.org/en/content/codeofconduct/](http://www.un.org/en/content/codeofconduct/)).

7 A/RES/74/128, para. 33.

# THE WAY FORWARD:

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS TO MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS TO IMPROVE WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNING BODY MEETINGS

As in the first edition of this report, the survey focused on progress made within the secretariats of governing boards in their efforts to improve women's participation and leadership in governing body meetings and processes. Given that multiple actors play a role in reaching the goal of gender parity in intergovernmental forums and processes, recommendations are also addressed to Member States and high-level officials. Ultimately, it is joint, complementary, sustained and coordinated efforts that will help achieve the full, effective and equal participation of women in decision-making processes. The following recommendations reinforce and expand upon the recommendations from the first edition of *Shaping the international agenda*.

**The secretariats of United Nations governing bodies can support the efforts of Member States and other stakeholders to improve women's participation and achieve gender equality through following actions:**

1. Continue to collect sex-disaggregated data on the composition of delegations attending conferences and meetings, heads of delegation, Chairs, Co-Chairs and facilitators, interventions in high-level openings of governing body meetings, interventions on specific agenda items, and panellists in side events, preparing regular reports on these for broad dissemination.
  2. Create and maintain a readily accessible, regularly updated and centralized database of women experts and speakers as a readily available resource to ensure gender parity in panels and meetings.
  3. Increase visibility of the importance of gender parity and improving women's participation by:
    - i. including in meeting notifications and event invitations any decisions, directives or similar measures encouraging or mandating the inclusion of women in delegations to meetings or their nomination as panellists in events
    - ii. providing information to Member States, proactively and systematically, when they are constituting bodies and informal groups or appointing facilitators and Chairs, on available measures to promote gender parity
    - iii. preparing fact sheets and guidance, in advance of meetings, on measures that are put in place to encourage and support women's participation in intergovernmental bodies (for example, nursing spaces, childcare, training, mentoring and networking opportunities and sexual harassment policies)
    - iv. undertaking specific communication campaigns to encourage the participation of women in governing body meetings.
4. Become familiar with and implement, to the extent possible, the [Enabling Environment Guidelines](#) and its [Supplementary Guidance](#) in support of the [Secretary-General's System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity](#).
  5. Create a community of practice among UNGBS members as a means of regularly exchanging information, best practices and opportunities, and a platform for mutual encouragement and support towards advancing gender parity and women's participation in intergovernmental meetings. Engage with Gender Focal Point(s) (GFPs) as a source of information on good practice.
  6. Build capacities of GFPs, for example by connecting them to the office of the Focal Point for Women in the United Nations System at UN Women.<sup>8</sup>
  7. Continue to explore collaboration among organizations, including with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and UN Women, to develop capacity-building and training programmes, and mobilize funding with the aim of promoting gender parity within governing bodies and at international conferences and meetings.

<sup>8</sup> Contact: [focalpoint.forwomen@unwomen.org](mailto:focalpoint.forwomen@unwomen.org).

8. Support and propose initiatives to Member States, such as the appointment of GFPs in delegations, to serve as strategic partners to implement gender-specific measures.
  9. Systematically use gender-neutral terminology (such as Chair(person) instead of Chairman), disseminate the information and encourage their use.
  10. Lead in addressing sexual misconduct and the prevention of sexual misconduct by:
    - i. disseminating to meeting participants the [Code of Conduct to Prevent Harassment, including Sexual Harassment, at UN System Events](#) published in 2019 by, for example, including it in information provided about meeting(s), integrating it into staff training and displaying it at meetings
    - ii. disseminating the [Guide for Managers: Prevention of, and Response to, Sexual Harassment in the Workplace](#)<sup>9</sup> and any other guidance produced by the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the United Nations System
    - iii. implementing comprehensive training to address sexual harassment<sup>10</sup>
    - iv. establishing and communicating clear guidelines, codes of conduct and/or rules with regard to sexual discrimination, harassment or misconduct, ensuring zero-tolerance and victim-centred approaches<sup>11</sup>
    - v. ensuring that there is a channel available to staff or delegates to report sexual discrimination, harassment or misconduct perpetrated in a governing body session.
1. Institute and implement temporary special measures or a similar mechanism through an inter-governmental decision and/or resolution that will ensure that women's representation in delegations to governing bodies is at least 30 per cent, aiming for a gradual increase to 50 per cent.
  2. Apply quotas, as necessary, 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. Build support for women's leadership and full, equal and effective participation through:
    - i. training and awareness-raising directed at both women and men delegates on issues related to gender equality and gender parity to enhance their understanding of and responsiveness to these issues
    - ii. targeted training and capacity-building activities for women delegates to increase women's participation in leadership and technical positions.
  4. Expand leadership opportunities for women by:
    - i. supporting 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
    - ii. creating opportunities for mentorship, networking and collaboration among women delegates as well as between women delegates and representatives from women's organizations.
  5. Dedicate travel and capacity-building funds to enable women delegates to attend intergovernmental meetings.
  6. Build awareness of the goal of gender parity by including key resolutions and decisions related to gender equality and gender parity in invitations to conferences and meetings, notifications for nominations, elections and appointments, and other forms of communication, including official websites.
  7. Establish and communicate clear guidelines, codes of conduct and rules with regard to sexual discrimination, harassment or misconduct, including with reference to the [Code of Conduct to Prevent](#)

**In their efforts to increase women's participation and achieve gender equality, Member States should consider the following measures:**

<sup>9</sup> Published in 2019. Available from the CEB website ([www.unsceb.org/](http://www.unsceb.org/)).

<sup>10</sup> For more guidance on training, see: UN Women (2020). *Stepping up to the Challenge: Towards International Standards on Training to End Sexual Harassment*. Available from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/discussion-paper-towards-international-standards-on-training-to-end-sexual-harassment>

<sup>11</sup> For more information, see UN Women (2019). *What Will it Take? Promoting Cultural Change to End Sexual Harassment* Available from: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/03/discussion-paper-towards-international-standards-on-training-to-end-sexual-harassment>

Harassment, including Sexual Harassment, at UN System Events published in 2019.

**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. Ensure implementation through gender-responsive budgeting, regular reporting and a review mechanism.
2. Lead by example, including by:
  - i. becoming an International Gender Champion or a member of related advocacy groups supporting gender parity and women's empowerment (such as the Group of Friends for Gender Parity)
  - ii. participating in panels only when gender parity is assured – when organizing events, ensure that there is gender parity within panels
  - iii. systematically using gender-neutral terminology (such as Chair(person) instead of Chairman) and encouraging staff and others to do the same.
3. Lead in efforts to strengthen gender-specific references (strong wording on gender equality and women's empowerment) in resolutions, decisions, official statements or interventions and remarks in events and other gatherings.
4. Support efforts to ensure gender parity in intergovernmental processes by:
  - i. disseminating information on intergovernmental commitments, initiatives and best practices on promoting gender equality, women's participation and gender parity to colleagues and reviewing recruitment practices and organizational culture
  - ii. creating opportunities for discussion, networking and collaboration among women staff and delegates and their male counterparts on leadership and negotiations in intergovernmental processes.
6. Address and prevent sexual misconduct by:
  - i. disseminating to meeting participants the [Code of Conduct to Prevent Harassment, including Sexual Harassment, at UN System Events](#) published in 2019 by, for example, including it in information provided about meeting(s), integrating it into staff training and displaying it at meetings
  - ii. disseminating the [Guide for Managers: Prevention of, and Response to, Sexual Harassment in the Workplace](#) and any other guidance produced by the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the United Nations System
  - iii. implementing comprehensive training to address sexual harassment<sup>12</sup>
  - iv. establishing and communicating clear guidelines, codes of conduct and rules with regard to sexual discrimination, harassment or misconduct, ensuring zero-tolerance and victim-centred approaches<sup>13</sup>
  - v. ensuring that there is a channel available to staff or delegates to report sexual discrimination, harassment or misconduct perpetrated in a governing body session.
11. Contribute to creating an enabling work environment. Please see recommendations and examples from the [Enabling Environment Guidelines](#) and its [Supplementary Guidance](#) in support of the [Secretary-General's System-wide Strategy on](#)

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