

MARCH 2017

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





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

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>



Australian Government

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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–Geneva¹ 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 Secretariat² 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.

¹ See <http://genderchampions.com> (accessed 18 January 2017).

² 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://ungbswb.org.wordpress.com/about> (accessed 18 January 2017).

THE WAY FORWARD: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS³

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

³ 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.

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

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.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.

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.



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.⁶ Temporary

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