



**United Nations Gender Network:  
United Nations Policy Proposal on Gender Equality and Parity**

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Cover Image, Angela Hayden

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## Introduction

The UN Gender Network (UNGN) is rooted in both strengthening the UN's leadership of gender equality and the empowerment of women working within the UN Secretariat, Funds, Programmes and Agencies. The UNGN believes that to enhance the UN's leadership legitimacy in all areas but particularly regarding gender equality; to ensure the UN attracts the best talent from around the globe and to guarantee the UN fully represents 'we the peoples' significant change regarding gender equality amongst UN staff is required.

This policy paper places the women who work at the UN at its core. This policy looks at the history of women working at the Organisation, past attempts to strengthen their roles and looking to the future, suggests changes at the both the policy and practice levels to ensure that women working at the UN will be better served. This policy proposal aims to cause a significant shift in not just the numbers of women working at all levels at the UN but also their experiences within the workplace. The policy's goal is to make the UN a better place for all staff to work and in doing so ensuring they can lead states in making their own workplaces into spaces where gender equality is without question a good.

Gender equality in the UN workplace is necessary for three reasons. First, gender equality as a matter of human rights ensures that each person can fulfil their own goals and contribute to the wider community to their best capacity without assumptions as to their ability, competence and expertise based entirely on their gender. Second, gender equality within the UN will ensure that it is a workplace where each individual can prosper, lead and bring their own experiences and knowledge to bare on policy development and implementation. Third, the UN, if it is to succeed in fulfilling its mandate under Article 1 of the Charter, must lead on gender equality and, as such, must be itself an example of gender equality in action.

The UNGN brings academics, civil society, member states and individuals working at the UN together in a spirit of conversation and collaboration. It aims to achieve a deep understanding of the causes and impact of gender inequality within the UN and the impact this has on its leadership. Our core focus is on the working lives of women in the UN secretariat, agencies and funds. A feminist outlook is taken in examining the continued gender inequality within the UN and we consider an intersectional and inclusive definition of women to be central to our understanding of equality.

## Definitions

This Policy adopts the following definitions: <sup>1</sup>

### **Gender Equality:**

The concept that all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities, and make choices without the limitations set by strict gender roles; that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally.

### **Gender Parity:**

Gender Parity, is the equal representation of genders, at all levels and in all areas, in the workplace. Full and equal workplace parity is contingent upon their equal representation in decision-making positions. Similar or equivalent participation rates within a 40 to 60 range of representation over a sustained period of time.

### **Gender Proofing:**

A check carried out on any policy proposal to ensure that any potential gender discriminatory effects arising from that policy have been avoided and that gender equality is promoted.

### **Direct Discrimination:**

Where a person is treated less favourably because of their sex.

### **Indirect Discrimination:**

Where a law, regulation, policy or practice, which is apparently neutral, has a disproportionate adverse impact on the members of one sex, unless the difference in treatment can be justified by objective factors.

### **Harassment and Bullying:**

Unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual. Managers are potentially liable when they are aware that harassment or bullying has taken place, and have not taken reasonable steps to prevent it from happening again.

This policy embraces all individuals who self-identify as women.

<sup>1</sup> These definitions are adapted from the European Commission Employment and Social Affairs One Hundred Words for Equality 1998 and UK Equality Act 2010



## The UN Gender Network

Led by Prof Rosa Freedman and Prof Aoife O'Donoghue the UNGN brings together academics and practitioners from across the globe. The aim is to harness expertise from academia, civil society, states and those with experience of working with and within the UN system to consider what has held the UN back from achieving gender equality, the current situation at the UN and what can be done to bring about change. Finally, the UNGN considers what continued gender inequality means for the UN's legitimacy in leading the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5.

Over the course of 18 months the UNGN has held a series of workshops in the UK, New York and Geneva to bring together as broad a group as possible. This ensures that the Network understands the problems facing the UN, the initiatives that are being taken, and the expertise available to bring about gender equality within the UN.

The policy proposals and narrative contained in this document are the result of long discussions and reflections on gender equality in the UN, and are rooted in a range of expertise, lived experiences and knowledge of what has or has not worked for women in achieving gender equality. The proposals are also based on the extensive research carried out by the authors over the past several years.

The UNGN aims to:

1. Establish a transnational UN Gender network that includes academics, civil society, the UN and state delegations through a series of workshops and an online community;
2. Explore how long-term collaborative activities can be fostered that can bring about effective policy change within the UN;
3. Harness expertise from academia, civil society, state delegations and the UN itself in the co-production of a research project agenda to understand the cause and impact of gender inequality within the UN and its impact upon the UN's leadership and legitimacy in the operationalisation of the SDGs; and
4. Use the Network's activities as a platform from which to develop targeted policy proposals alongside specific research collaborations that make effective policy recommendations to the UN to ensure long term change and to underpin the implementation of the SDGs, particularly Goal 5.

## Gender Equality at the United Nations: A Brief History

The UN Charter preamble as well as Articles 1.3, 8 and 101 provide the basis for equality in its workplace. During the drafting of the Charter it was acknowledged that it was important for the Charter to directly reference women to ensure that they were guaranteed access to employment in the Organisation. Women such as Gabrielle Radziwill had paved the way at the League of Nations while women like Bertha Lutz ensured that women were in the Charter.

The following resolutions are a timeline of targets for gender parity which remain unfulfilled.

- 1986:** General Assembly Resolution 41/206 gender inequality officially recognised as a problem within the UN target of 30% subject to geographic representation by 1990
- 1996:** General Assembly Resolution 51/67 sets the year 2000 as a target for gender parity
- 1998:** General Assembly Resolution 52/96 creates the Focal Point for Women (FPW)
- 2001:** General Assembly Resolution 55/69 gender parity in ‘the very near future’.
- 2005:** General Assembly Resolution 59/164 gender parity in ‘the very near future’.
- 2010:** General Assembly Resolution 64/141 gender parity without any deadline.
- 2016:** General Assembly Resolution 70/133 re-iterated the need to meet a target of 50/50.

Secretary-General António Guterres has pledged to reach parity at the senior leadership level, including USGs, ASGs, SRSGs and Special Envoys, by 2021, and parity across the entire UN System “well before 2030”.



Alongside resolutions there a number landmark moment for gender equality policies, law and practice at the global level.

- 1919:** Covenant of the League of Nations Article 7 & Constitution of the International Labour Organisation Article 395
- 1937:** League of Nations Committee of Inquiry on the Status of Women
- 1945:** Charter of the United Nations Preamble, Articles 1.3, 8, 101
- 1946:** Commission on the Status of Women
- 1975:** World Conference on Women, Mexico
- 1979:** Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
- 1985:** World Conference on Women, Nairobi
- 1995:** World Conference on Women, Beijing: Beijing Declaration & Platform for Action
- 1998:** Focal Point for Women
- 2000:** UN Security Council Resolutions 1325
- 2000:** Millennium Development Goals 3
- 2008:** UN Security Council Resolutions 1820
- 2010:** UN Women
- 2015:** UN System Wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP)
- 2015:** Sustainable Development Goal 5

This brief history demonstrates that both the UN and its member states recognise that gender equality and parity are important but also that, thus far, the systems in place to achieve these targets have been insufficient.

It also demonstrates this is not a new story. That women have been clamouring to actively work within international organisations from their inception, and that their presence has made significant differences. The changes women spearheaded include internal changes to the UN and transformations to policy, practice and law for women globally. Beyond work directly related to gender, women at the Organisation significantly impact on the work of the Organisation in all areas of its operations.

## Snapshot of the current situation at the UN

At the UN's Secretariat, its funds, programmes, and agencies, 41% of staff are female while 59% are male. In field operations, less than 30% of staff are female. This is a significant number as field deployment frequently is required for promotion. There is also variance within the Secretariat, Funds, Programmes, and Agencies. At the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights almost 60% of staff are women, while at the United Nations Department for Safety and Security it is less than 20%, and at the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei it is just over 20%. On the 48 bodies outlined in the System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity 2017 1/3 of the bodies had reached a point where women represented at least 40% of staff whereas 31% of bodies still had less than 30% of staff who were female.

Within those statistics it is also important to consider seniority, as parity requires not simply a specific minimum number of women but their representation at all levels. At the most senior level, the UN Secretary General is male, as were all of his predecessors. In January 2018 the UNSG achieved gender parity in his senior management group for the first time in the UN's history. However, there remains problems at all other senior levels. At the Under-Secretary General level, it is at 20% female and at the D-1 level (the first rung of seniority) it is just over 30%. At the entry professional scale, P-1 75% are female while at the most senior of junior ranks, P-5 35% are female.

From 2005 to 2015, there was no change at the very top as the UNSG has remained a male office. At the USG level it was at 20% female and is now at just less than 30%. At the D1 level it was at about 25% in 2005 and in 2015 it is just above 30%. At the P1 level, it was at just less than 60% in 2005 and in 2015 it was just over 60%. This represents very slight changes between 2005 and 2015 where the percentage of women at the junior levels – which it might be expected women would advance through the system and improve the statistics, at the very least in first level of seniority - has not occurred. There is no perceptible trickle up for female staff based on these statistics.

Within General Services, 78% of staff are women in the Executive Office of the Secretary General are female, in the Peacebuilding Support office, 100% of staff are women, while in the Ethics Office 25% are female. In Geneva, at the UN Office, 46% of general services staff are female while in Nairobi the figure is 51%.

With regard to Gender Equality and Parity policies there is huge variance across the Organisation as to the content and presence of such policies. Together with The Advocates for Rights the Network conducted a mapping exercise of the UN employment policies which revealed a large amount of variance, with some very good practice at some bodies and complete absences of policies within other bodies. The UN's own statistics suggest that as of 2015 11% of bodies did not have any sexual harassment, assault or exploitation policies. 30% of bodies did not have a discrimination policy while 33% had no anti-retaliation policy. These absences are particularly acute where there is no employment or anti-discrimination law that underpins the system providing a safety net for employees beyond Organisation policy. This places UN staff in particularly vulnerable position.

## A need for change?

The 100-year anniversary of the creation of the League of Nations is fast approaching. This is a momentous event for women working at the international level. At a time when, bar a very small minority, all states excluded women from acting as diplomats the League of Nations, following the intervention of women's organisations, specifically stated in its Covenant that women were as entitled to work for the Organisation as men.

In 1919, both the League of Nations and the International Labour Organisation, were global leaders in gender access to diplomacy. Women, who were important present figures in diplomatic salons and balls as well as in civil society activism, were finally officially part of the international core of actors. Women still living under colonialism were not present and social, economic and racialised state policies ensured that other women could not avail of those opportunities. Nonetheless, the global organisations were at the vanguard.

Unfortunately, now, the UN falls behind many member states. This is perhaps best characterised by the use of successes of member states as proxy for achievements by the Organisation. For instance, celebrating advances in terms of gender representation amongst ambassadors to the UN Security Council when this is an achievement of states' own policies towards its diplomatic corps rather than the UN.

There are complex reasons for the UN's failure to achieve gender parity and equality. These include the focus on a narrow interpretation of geographic representation that does not embrace gender, economics or other factors as aspects of geographic representation. It may also stem from a perception that to work for the UN is to work for a higher cause and so other factors, that ought to be expected that ensure workplaces are places where individuals thrive, are considered less significant. Another factor may be the absences of employment law that is applicable to staff. The absence of such fail-safes means that it is incumbent on the UN to create specific policies around accountability and anti-harassment as the lack of such policies leave a vacuum where staff have nowhere to turn. The UN, like all other global organisations are also influenced by their geographic context and the policies of states. Yet, the exceptionalism of the UN is no longer a basis for failure. The Organisation has set many targets on gender and missed them all repeatedly.

A new, improved UN workplace is needed. This workplace will ensure that every individual can thrive, contribute and succeed making the UN not only a better place to work but also better at carrying out its many heavy responsibilities.

Change is possible, but real substantive change is required.

## UN Gender Network: Policy Proposals

The proposals below are based upon five premises:

1. Gender equality requires change in organisational culture. This necessitates attitudinal, practice and purpose change. The idea that working at the UN is a 'calling' ought not to be the basis for forestalling change in the workplace.
2. Gender parity requires representation of women across the Organisation as a whole and at all levels of seniority. Parity is not simply measured by a snapshot of a particular date but rather a longitudinal understanding of women's presence or absence.
3. The UN, as a global leader, must undertake the best practices that have emerged from state-based activity. A culture of exceptionalism for the 'special' nature of employment at the UN cannot be a basis for intransigence.
4. Partial change and numerical targets, thus far, have not succeeded, more radical steps are required.
5. The aim of gender equality and parity is to assist in making a workplace a space where all can flourish and develop.

## Policy Proposal: Sustainable Gender Equality at the United Nations

### Foundational and Legal Mandate

1. The United Nations (UN) should recognise that it has legal gender mandate within the UN Charter based on the Preamble, Article 1.3, Article 8 and Article 101.
  - a. The UN should consider the legal mandate for geographical representation to include gender difference;
  - b. Gender representation and geographical representations should be regarded as mutually re-enforcing in recruitment, retention, promotion and progression policies and decisions.
2. The UN should recognise that the foundational gender mandate creates a legally binding obligation on the Organisation, its funds, programs and specialised agencies, to ensure gender equality.
3. The legal mandate on women should be referenced and foregrounded in all documents. In documents addressing the gender question, recruitment, and organisational matters the import of gender equality and parity to the Organisation should be asserted.
4. A clear legal structure that categorises and organises the institutional policies and legal documents of the UN regarding gender equality and parity ought to be created.

### Gender Parity and Gender Equality

5. Clear and uniform definitions of gender equality, gender parity, gender proofing, direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment and bullying in the workplace should be adopted.

#### Gender Equality:

The concept that all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities, and make choices without the limitations set by strict gender roles; that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally.

#### Gender Parity:

Gender Parity, is the equal representation of genders, at all levels and in all areas, in the workplace. Full and equal workplace parity is contingent upon their equal representation in decision-making positions. Similar or equivalent participation rates within a 40 to 60 range of representation over a sustained period of time.

#### Gender Proofing:

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#### Direct Discrimination:

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#### Indirect Discrimination:

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**Harassment and Bullying:**

Unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual. Managers are potentially liable when they are aware that harassment or bullying has taken place, and have not taken reasonable steps to prevent it from happening again.

6. Definitions, policies and strategies should be made available to all staff and publicly available and searchable on UN websites;
7. Staff and supervisors/managers should be regularly re-informed of their rights and responsibilities under the strategy and governing bodies/executives of all UN system entities should be regularly informed on the implementation and impact of such strategy.
8. The UN should gather sex-disaggregated statistics on all aspects of the Organisation's work.
9. An immediate review of pay should be undertaken to consider the extent of a gender pay gap, if any, at the UN.
10. Indicators and measurements of specifics of gender equality and parity, monitoring and evaluation and gender proofing of all policies affecting staffs should be gathered and published.  
This could mirror the UN's own Gender Equality Index including:  
<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index>
  - a. Pay Gaps
  - b. Promotions
  - c. Access to Professional Development
  - d. Leaving the UN
  - e. Uptake on policies designed to promote gender equality

**Evaluation and Accountability**

11. The UN should conduct a series of tests to consider whether it would meet the requirements of
  - a. International Labour Organisation Gender Equality Standards - Convention 100, 111, 156 and 183, and relevant sectoral standards of relevance such as the Domestic Workers Convention (No.189)
  - b. Sustainable Development Goal 5 standards,
  - c. United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979.
12. The UN should prepare an Annual Report to mirror state reports to CEDAW and submit this to a Panel of Experts comprised of independent experts knowledgeable of the issues. That report and the concluding observations of the Panel of Experts should be circulated to staff and made publicly available.
13. Accountability of all staff, not just senior managers, is needed, including:
  - a. A demonstration of commitment to gender equality from all staff e.g. in their adoption and implementation of policies as well as their success in reaching and sustaining equality and parity targets; and,
  - b. Ongoing compulsory training for staff at all levels issues including but not limited to unconscious bias, bullying, gender equality, gender parity and intersectionality.

14. Senior managers must lead on these issues and should undertake unconscious bias, gender equality, bullying and harassment training immediately as well as taking part in the Focal Point for Women activities.
15. Appraisals of senior staff should include assessment of their performance in addressing gender-issues. Failure to meet gender equality and parity targets should be taken account of as a failure to fulfil existing role.
16. Senior staff in achieving goals should be held accountable for, recording outcomes and rolling out policy changes, with specific mechanisms where managers fail to achieve gender equality within specific time periods. This must include consequences for senior managers and departments that continually fail to meet objectives in promotion or pay reviews. This must include career and remuneration-related consequences including warnings on Personnel files, withdrawal of annual steps, suspension, dismissal, budgetary reductions, withdrawal of human resources powers to recruit etc.
17. Where gender parity targets go into reverse, managers must report this immediately to the head of the Agency or Fund setting out targeted processes for preventing any further regression and reported to the Human Resources Department, the Focal Point for Women and the Office of the Secretary General.

### Minimum Standards

18. The Organisation should mandate consistency of policies across the entire system immediately. This should include a minimum set of policies that each department must implement:
  - a. Sexual and other Harassment,
  - b. Discrimination,
  - c. Bullying,
  - d. Complaints Mechanisms, including the UNDT
  - e. Abuse of Authority,
  - f. Anti-retaliation,
  - g. Parental and Carer Leave,
  - h. Maternity and Paternity Leave with flexibility for shared Leave,
  - i. Adoption Leave,
  - j. Childcare,
  - k. Breastfeeding - so that staff can comply with World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines at a minimum,
  - l. Work/Life Balance - including specific details around flexible working,
  - m. Exit Interviews,
  - n. Role of Focal Points and
  - o. Gender specific health related issues.
19. Policies need to be readily accessible and searchable for each department and as a central resource (See Focal Point)
20. Each department should adopt the same minimum standards with the further higher standards adopted as per the need of each section.
21. Transparent and accessible reporting structures should exist within every entity for circumstances in which policies are violated or not upheld.



22. Negative consequences for promotion in the uptake of such policies must be removed and the use of such policies become a standard practice.
23. Rewards for positive behaviour and punishments for poor behaviour must be made clear and be available publicly.

### **Focal Point for Women**

24. The UN should re-launch the Focal Points for Women as a resource for women across the system separate to the resources for managers currently curated by UN Women.
25. The Focal Point should be adequately funded to ensure the network of Focal Points are sufficiently resourced.
26. The Focal Point's online presence should be updated and its web presence established as a resource where statistics on gender are updated regularly and all policies are catalogued and easily accessible.
27. Each Focal Point should be given standard terms of reference with additional terms of reference for each department.
28. Each Focal must be given a specific workload allocation and senior managers within each department must take part in the activities of the Focal Point within the department.
29. The Focal Point should not be a junior member of the department.
30. The UN's lead Focal Point should produce an Annual Report collated from reports from each Focal Point in each Department that reflects a mid-level response to achieving gender equality. This annual report must be submitted to the Department Director and HR Director, copied to the head of the entity's Gender Equality Bureau or similar unit if it exists. In the interests of broader information sharing and results tracking over time it shall be for each organization to decide whether to make this detailed report public, for example, by tabling it before the governing body/executive at sessions where human resources issues are examined in depth.

### **Permanent Measures**

31. The UN should rename the term 'temporary special measures' as their title is part of their ineffectiveness. Instead, policies which previously were considered special ought to be made permanent unless or until gender parity is reached and maintained across the Organisation.  
This includes:
  - a) Gender parity on shortlists of applicants.
  - b) Removal of ranking of candidates to ensure that a gender sensitive understanding of experience, competence and efficiency is maintained.
  - c) Written justifications for the selection of male candidates at P3 - where the leaky pipeline starts.
  - d) Remedial plans adopted and six-monthly reporting undertaken to the Human Resources Department, the Focal Point for Women and the Office of the Secretary General, until gender parity is achieved and maintained.
  - e) Mandatory training for all staff on unconscious bias, gender equality, bullying and harassment with specific training for all who serve on interview panels.
  - f) Gender parity on interview panels.
  - g) Presence of trained focal points at all levels of recruitment including advertising, selection and interviewing.

- h) Reviews of qualified women on rosters who have not been selected after a specific period of time.
- i) Introduction of flexible working arrangements, such as working hours and vacation time adapted to school days and vacations, internal procedures regarding hours when meetings are held, remote working.

### **Recruitment**

- 32. The UN should review all of its recruitment materials. It should make clear that it has incorporated specific gender equality policies and that it is working towards enhanced work/life balance. The UN should investigate innovative methods of targeting women whom it currently does not reach.
- 33. There needs to be a firm commitment to no all-male shortlists, and to gender parity on shortlists as a longer-term goal. For senior posts, member states must commit to awareness-raising to demonstrate their support for identifying and nominating women for those positions.

### **Promotion and Retention**

- 34. The UN should review all of its promotion materials. It should make clear that it has incorporated specific gender equality policies to ensure that gender related issues will be considered in promotion.
- 35. The UN should investigate women's views of current promotion practices and materials whom it currently does not reach.
- 36. The UN should immediately review its use of short-term contracts as well as unpaid internships including examining the gender differentials within these contracts and whether there is a leaky pipeline from short term contracts/unpaid internships into permanent positions.
- 37. In particular, unpaid internships have been proven to be an exclusionary source of training and should be phased out.
- 38. The culture of long-term use of non-permanent contracts, such as UNVs, should be addressed, for example by such contracts being limited to a set number of years before staff become permanent.

### **Organisational Culture**

- 39. The UN should conduct a full study of its Organisational Culture.
- 40. This should include an annual anonymous staff survey across the Organisation, the results of which should be published to staff detailing the institutional and departmental results together with the response from managers to staff concerns. The survey should solicit responses on the following areas:
  - a. Questions on gender equality,
  - b. Organisational response to harassment/bullying,
  - c. Suitability of complaints mechanisms,
  - d. Leadership of policy change and good organisational culture,
  - e. Work/Life Balance, and
  - f. Role of informal mentoring, coaching and sponsoring.
- 41. Further detailed work on organisational culture needs to be completed including cross-organisational interviews and staff generated policy proposals and reforms.
- 42. Each department should on a five-year basis write a manifesto on gender equality and work/life balance and this should be promulgated to staff regularly.

43. The UN should consider the artwork in all its workplaces. It should consider who the artists are and who is represented and celebrated in the art work. It should also consider the gender specific roles given to individuals in the artwork.
44. The UN should revisit its historical narrative within its buildings, online and in its published work, it should assess whether the significant role of women in the Organisation's history represented or is their absence remarked upon?
45. The UN should formalise a system of mentoring, coaching and sponsoring.
46. All staff at the P level should be assigned a mentor, who has undergone unconscious bias and gender training; and Senior staff should also undertake mentoring from peers who have successfully implemented gender equality provisions and met gender parity targets. If insufficient staff are available, the Organisation should look outside to individuals who have successfully lead in such circumstances in large organisations.
47. The UN should review how it supports staff in the field; the resources they are given, the categorisation of family stations, the provision of personal and private necessities including sanitary materials, essential medicines etc.
48. Measures in the UN Secretary General's 2017 Report should be mandatory and not be perceived as mere recommendations.



