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## **Economic Commission for Europe**

Conference of European Statisticians

### **Group of Experts on Gender Statistics**

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Item C of the provisional agenda

**Gender, climate, and the environment**

## **Women's Participation in the UNFCCC: 10 Years After Committing to a "Gradual, but Significant Increase"**

**Note by the Women's Environment and Development Organization**

### *Abstract*

Women's participation in decision-making is a human right. Their participation in the climate change negotiations is not only crucial (and has been proven) to create more robust, comprehensive outcomes, but must be inherent to the process precisely because this right exists. It's now been ten years since the landmark Decision 23/CP.18 stated that gender balance in the UNFCCC must be achieved as a "gradual but significant increase". However, progress has not been consistent or significant. We continue to see very few Party delegations with equal numbers of men and women, and the majority of delegations are dominated by men.

The unevenly slow improvement, at times even setbacks, demonstrates the lack of commitment to achieving gender balance in the UNFCCC. Parties are bringing thousands more delegates to participate in the negotiations, with COP27 nearly twice the size of COP25, but they are not prioritizing gender balance in their delegations. At the current rate, gender balance in party delegations will not be attained until 2042, while there is no forecastable future where COP Heads of Delegations will achieve gender parity. To accelerate this necessary progress, there is a necessity to remind parties of their commitments in the face of upcoming meetings, such as actively striving for gender balance. At this time when Party delegations continue to grow in size, there is a perfect opportunity to intentionally reflect on what that should mean for the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of the negotiations.

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## **I. Introduction**

### **A. Women’s Environment and Development Organization**

1. The Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) is a global women’s advocacy organization for a just world that promotes and protects human rights, gender equality, and the integrity of the environment.

### **B. Gender Climate Tracker**

2. The following comments are informed by the Gender Climate Tracker (GCT), an online platform and App that contains key statistics, policies, and research related to gender and climate for the community of advocates, practitioners, and decision-makers—including climate negotiators—who recognize the interlinkages between gender and climate change and want to track the implementation of climate action under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. All Party delegation information stems from the UNFCCC’s final list of participants, which the GCT disaggregates by Party, and which has slight differences from the aggregate Party delegation percentages presented by the UNFCCC in the annual gender composition report. All gender composition data regarding UNFCCC constituted bodies comes from the annual UNFCCC gender composition report.

### **C. Gender and Environment Data Alliance**

3. WEDO is part of the Gender and Environment Data Alliance (GEDA), an alliance which aims to improve the availability, accessibility, understanding, and application of quality and robust data and information at the gender and environment nexus. The work showcased here supports the work developed within GEDA.

## **II. Background**

### **A. Gender-differentiated Impacts of Climate Change**

4. The gender-differentiated impacts of climate change are well established. Situations of climate change risk and disaster compound existing gender inequalities and other intersecting forms of discrimination. Women and girls are, however, powerful agents of change in the fight against climate breakdown, and have a right to participate at all levels of decision-making in climate change policies and programs at local, national, regional and international levels. The UN General Resolution on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment recognizes the importance of gender equality and gender-responsive action to address climate change and environmental degradation, and the value of "empowerment, leadership, decision-making and full, equal and meaningful participation of women and girls, and the role that women play as managers, leaders and defenders of natural resources and agents of change in safeguarding the environment".

### **B. Gender Mandates within the UNFCCC**

5. The UNFCCC has mentioned gender in 119 different decisions, including specific stand-alone decisions regarding gender like the Lima Work Programme on Gender (2014) and Gender Action Plans (2017 and 2019). Fifty (50) of these decisions are categorized with the tag of “gender balance,” as they address the idea of striving for equal numbers of men and women within processes.

6. The first mention of women or gender in UNFCCC decisions was a stand-alone decision concerning gender, Decision 36/CP.7, adopted at the seventh Conference of the Parties in 2001, four years after the Kyoto Protocol was negotiated. This decision sought to improve the participation of women in UNFCCC constituted bodies, inviting Parties to consider women for elective posts. There were no targets set and no consequences for failure to nominate women. This was more than 10 years before the Secretariat started tracking sex-dissaggregated data on constituted bodies through its annual gender composition report (link), but based on later data, it is likely that many at that time set precedent with majority-male members. This first decision did not mention gender balance on Party delegations except to note “improvement” on the election of officers on constituted bodies, nor was there any consideration of the gender composition of non-Party stakeholders. (The Women and Gender Constituency would not become a constituency until 2009, with formal recognition in 2011.)
7. It was 8 years before the next integration of gender into a decision, in 2009, and 2 additional years until gender balance was raised again, demonstrating a lack of recognition of the cruciality of this issue. These decisions did not establish clear parameters for achieving gender balance but affirmed its importance. Thus, as time progressed without evident advancement in women’s participation, the milestone Decision 23/CP.18 in 2012 stated that gender balance in constituted bodies must be achieved as a “gradual but significant increase”. It also added gender as a standing item on the agenda of COP. However, ten years since this mandate came into existence, it is evident that progress has not been consistent or significant. Gender balance has still not been achieved, nor is close to being achieved within the UNFCCC.
8. Two years later, the Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender and its Gender Action Plan (Decision 18/CP.20) required the review of the implementation of all gender-related mandates, called for training for women delegates, and solicited the appointment of a senior gender focal point at the secretariat. This decision was then prolonged for three years by Decision 21/CP.22, which built up the foundations for the Gender Action Plan (GAP).
9. The Gender Action Plan (GAP) was created by Decision 3/CP.23, highlighting a significant lack of progress towards gender balance within delegations and constituted bodies. The GAP, however, did not provide the systemic change that needed to occur in order to achieve gender balance. It has no indicators to track progress on delegations or bodies. COP27, poised for the intermediate review of the GAP, provided a particular opportunity for the successful gender integration in the UNFCCC. Nonetheless, the review fell short, “inviting” parties to nominate women as high-level climate champions and promote gender balance, as well as “inviting” the secretariat [to promote] gender-balanced events”. The intermediate revision decision concludes stating that it should “be undertaken subject to the availability of financial resources”, limiting critical action on gender balance.

### **III. Gender Balance in UNFCCC Climate Negotiations**

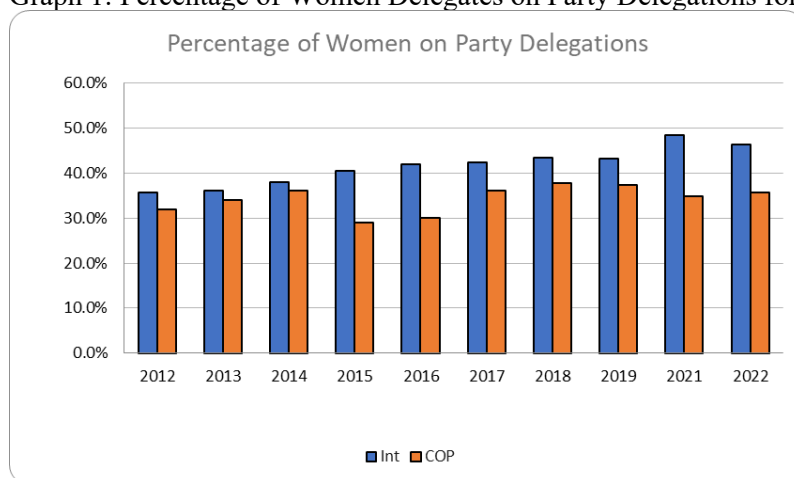
#### **A. Women’s Participation in Party Delegations**

10. In 2008, the first year that the GCT collected data on Party delegations to the negotiations disaggregated by sex, COP14 had 31% women’s participation and 82% of Party delegations had more men than women. With the latest data from 2022, very few Party delegations have equal numbers of men and women, while the majority of delegations remain dominated by

men. At COP27, 36% of Party delegates were women, a less than 5 percentage point improvement, and 76% of Party delegations still had more men than women.

11. While the percentage of Party delegates who were women was greater at COP27 (36%) than COP26 (35%), these proportions are lower than pre-pandemic COPs. In 2018 and 2019, participation was 38% and 37%, respectively, and in 2019, only 70% of delegations had more men than women. This unevenly slow improvement, at times even setbacks, demonstrates the lack of commitment to achieving gender balance in the UNFCCC. More Party delegates attended COP27 than COP26, and COP26 was a larger COP than COP25, with COP27 nearly twice the size as COP25. Parties are bringing thousands more delegates to participate in the negotiations but not more women. Parties as a whole are not prioritizing gender balance in their delegations.

Graph 1: Percentage of Women Delegates on Party Delegations for Intersessionals and COP



## B. Women’s Participation in UNFCCC’s Constituted Bodies

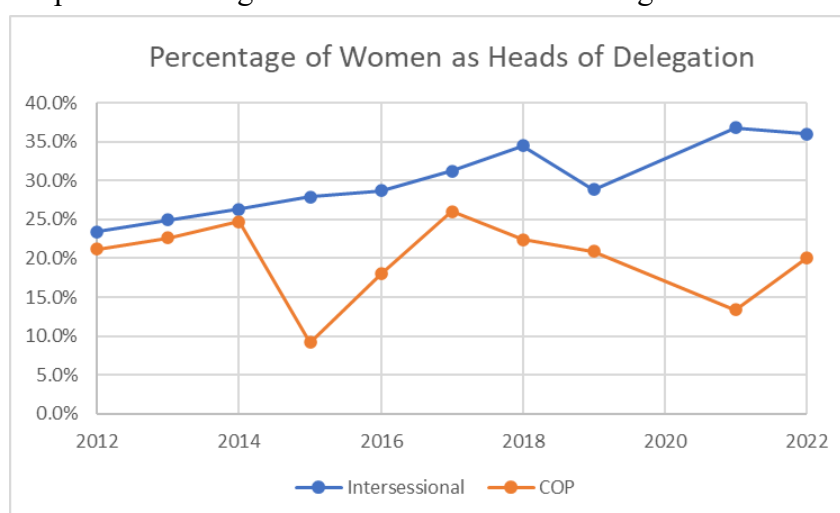
12. UNFCCC’s 17 constituted bodies exist to provide expertise, technical input and advice to further the implementation of the Convention, Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement. These bodies are supported by the UNFCCC Secretariat. In their composition, tracked by the UNFCCC but visualized overtime on the Gender Climate Tracker website and app, there has been some general but again inconsistent improvement.
13. Only 4 out of 17 constituted bodies have 50% or more women’s participation (Adaptation Committee, Paris Committee on Capacity Building, WIM Executive Committee and the Facilitative Working Group). The Adaptation Committee has the highest women’s representation (81%) and is the only body that has shown a consistent increase throughout the years (56% in 2020 and 63% in 2021). With only 10% women’s participation, the bodies with lowest women’s participation were the Technology Executive Committee (TEC) and the Executive Board of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM Executive Board). TEC in particular demonstrates a lack of progress, having reached its all time high in 2018 with 40% women’s participation and showing a gradual decline since then. Overall, women’s representation on constituted bodies averaged 39% in 2022.

## IV. Women’s Leadership in the UNFCCC Negotiations

### A. Women’s Leadership

14. The “full, equal and meaningful participation” of women requires not only achieving gender balance among delegations, but also guaranteeing women have the same place of power in any climate negotiations, including as leaders. However, women are less likely to be in positions of power than they are to participate in any delegation or body.
15. In COP27, 20% of Heads of Delegation were women. While once again better than COP26 (13%), this proportion was lower than COP23, COP24, and COP25. COP presidents have also been historically men, with only 4 women thus far acting as COP president (15%). Similarly, 9 out of the 17 constituted bodies under the UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement have at least one woman chair or co-chair (52%). 3 of the 11 co-chairmanships (or chair and vice-chair pairs) are all women, 5 are all men, and 3 are gender mixed.

Graph 2: Percentage of Women as Heads of Delegation

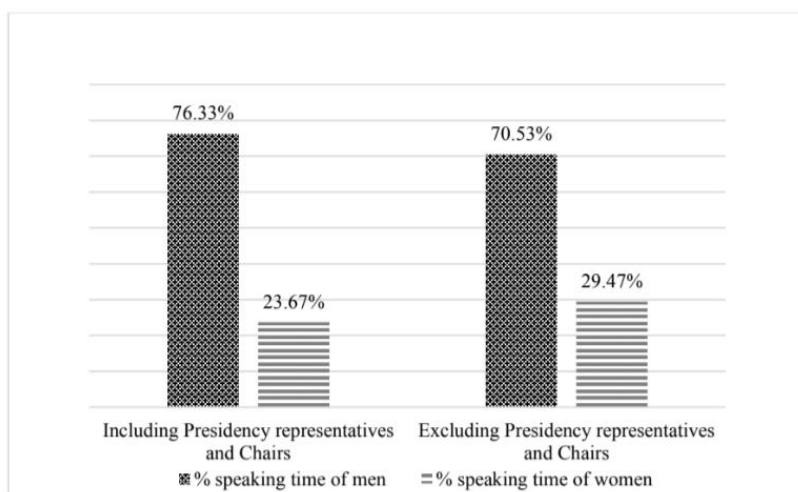


### A. Gender Disparities in Interventions

#### 1. Frequency and Length of Interventions

16. Women’s participation as Party delegates also does not mean they will have space to share their expertise and opinions during the negotiations. Case studies of sex-disaggregated speaking time (not tracked consistently) show that women are often, but not always, less represented during the negotiations. Analysis of speaking times undertaken by the UNFCCC secretariat shows that, during negotiations, women are less likely to speak than men and, when they do make interventions, these are generally much shorter than those made by men. The UNFCCC Gender Composition report for 2022 showed that, while men accounted for 51 percent of registered government delegates, they accounted for 60% of active speakers in the plenary—those meetings attended by all Parties—and spoke for 74% of the time.

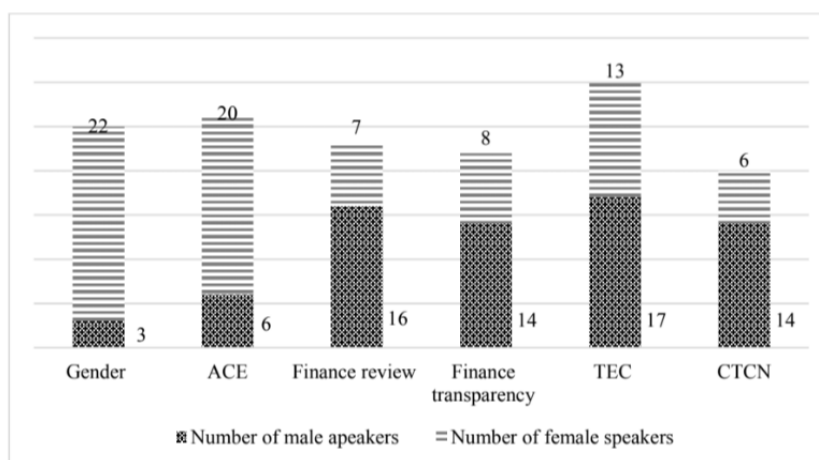
Figure 1. Participation of women and men, including and excluding Presidency representatives and Chairs, and their speaking times during plenaries at the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties.



## 2. Gender Disparities Across Thematic Areas

17. In the UNFCCC constituted bodies, it appears that a key variable is the topic that the body covers, as areas such as adaptation have consistently strong women’s participation rates, while technology, mitigation, and finance-focused bodies continue to see significantly lower numbers, such as the aforementioned 10% women’s participation in the TEC and CDM Executive Board, and 35% in the Standing Committee on Finance. Observed trends suggest that this discrepancy is related to both narrative assumptions of women and gender issues as related solely to livelihoods and resilience, making gender issues more widely prevalent in policy-making around adaptation and capacity building and speaking to the need for Parties to identify and nominate women experts in every field of climate work. The bodies with the highest women’s participation in 2022 were the Adaptation Committee (81%), Facilitative Working Group (64%), and the Paris Committee on Capacity Building (58%).
18. Strong gender differences exist between different areas of the negotiations—for example, finance, gender, technology, adaptation, etc.—when it comes to speaking roles and time. Areas such as adaptation have consistently strong women’s participation rates, while technology (27% of the speaking time and 13 women speakers compared to 17 male speakers in TEC) and finance-focused bodies (40% of the speaking time and 11 women speakers compared to 16 male speakers) continue to see lower numbers.
19. While improving the percentage of women at the table and ensuring their voices may improve gender-specific climate needs and solutions being integrated into the climate negotiations, increasing women’s representation and leadership is not the same as developing gender-transformative climate action. Being a woman does not guarantee expertise on the gender-climate nexus. The gendered dimensions of climate change should be considered cross-sectorally and with intersectionality, guided by experts on the subject. Only by valuing women’s participation and leadership as well as gender expertise can we create comprehensive, inclusive climate solutions that challenge current power structures and advance gender equality.

Figure 2. Number of female and male speakers during COP26, by thematic meeting.



## V. Conclusion

20. The statistics in this paper on the current lack of women’s participation in the UNFCCC, and lack of progress toward a “gradual, but significant increase”, are only useful if they inform and catalyze concrete action. Parties cannot assume that this disparity will simply fix itself over time—the majority of Parties must answer the call, one so often agreed upon by all Parties in their UNFCCC decisions, to truly prioritize women’s participation. At the current rate, gender balance in Party delegations to COP will not be attained until 2042, while, given the fluctuations, there is no forecastable future where COP Heads of Delegations will achieve gender balance. To accelerate progress, Parties must focus on women’s participation in their delegations and any nominations to constituted bodies:
- i. Parties should actively integrate women delegates into Party delegations. Parties with gender-balanced delegations should share their experiences and advocate to other Parties, further cementing the correlation between curtailing climate change and achieving gender equality.
  - ii. Parties should critically examine the gender composition of decision-makers and/or leadership teams within the key ministries, departments, and/or units contributing to the negotiations and implementation of the UNFCCC. By reflecting these gendered considerations and striving for gender balance in professional development strategies or mentorship and training programs, the gender-balance of these units may improve and thus be ultimately reflected in delegations.
  - iii. Parties should provide transparent avenues for professional development and leadership opportunities in the negotiations, from supporting succession planning for Heads of Delegation to ensure women are able to step into those roles, to building thematic expertise and putting forth women as thematic coordinators, to nominating and supporting women to membership and chairship positions within constituted bodies.
  - iv. Parties should guarantee full, equal and meaningful participation of women delegates by actively building capacity, knowledge management, diplomacy and communication skills for their respective negotiation areas, particularly negotiation areas that have been historically male-dominated.