



# *United Nations gender network: second workshop report*

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# UN Gender Network Workshop II: Report

Foreign and Commonwealth Office London, May 13th 2017

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## Introduction

The following is a record of the second **UN Gender Network** Meeting hosted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on May 13<sup>th</sup> 2017. The AHRC funded **UN Gender Network** brings academics, civil society, member states and the UN Secretariat itself together in a spirit of conversation and collaboration. Our core focus is on the UN Secretariat and UN Agencies and the working lives of women within those organisations. 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 of the Sustainable Development Goals and broader development policy. The Network also aims to set forth potential policy and legal change to the UN Secretariat and Agencies to bring about gender equality.

## Session 1: Country Experiences

Introductory remarks focused on the United Nations being one of the few international organisations committed to diversity, with gender very much on its agenda. However, progress cannot be taken for granted. And it is important to acknowledge that we are still struggling to get women into the upper levels of the UN. Within the UK FCO there are just over 30% women within senior positions, which meets its targets but it is time for more ambitious targets. One method the FCO has deployed is insisting that there are women in all UK delegations to the UN.

**Canada** has taken great strides in terms of gender over recent years. Women and girls are at the heart of Canada's development aid, and the country is working with UNFPA and the UK on the Family Planning Summit. Trudeau has actualised his pledge to have gender parity in his Cabinet, and this is replicated with 50% women in senior public service staff positions. However, there are only 26% female members of parliament, and only 22% of top board members are female. The average earnings are 88 cents on the dollar for women. There are initiatives to change and improve matters, with many focusing on family policies and increasing women leadership in communities. Other initiatives include the 'Gender-Based Analysis Plus' scheme that focuses on age, geography, income, and education, amongst others. Gender-based promotions are helpful for gender parity in Foreign Service promotions, as is Unconscious Bias training for ambassadors. There are active gender equality networks, and names will no longer appear on Foreign Service job applications. It is important to stress that gender parity is about more than numbers. Shifting attitudes and organisations cultures is crucial.

**The Netherlands** discussed its policies at home and abroad. They target women from the Dutch system to enter the UN system. The Permanent Representative in New York declines invitations to all-male panels, which is a small but important way of leading and emphasising the need for female representation. The quality of the UN as an employer is important because people leave comfortable jobs to enter the system. States need to come up with qualified female candidates for top-level jobs. The UN Secretariat in New York is a

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male-dominated environment, where the focus is on presence and long hours, which is not very accommodating for all staff but especially for women. The women's talent pipeline at the UN is excellent, and requires a very focused and determined approach to ensure that it develops and continues. At present, it is not very embedded in UN structures, and needs more support to overcome its vulnerability and to actualise its excellent potential.

Domestically the Netherlands aims for 30% of senior Foreign Service staff to be female, although this is too low and these types of targets should not still be needed. That target is imposed by Parliament, and for years the Foreign Service said that it could not meet the target. Seven years ago, a Minister decided to meet the target, and did so in one year. This shows that leadership is needed to make these things happen. However, recent decentralisation of hiring responsibilities means that embassies now hire personnel, which might be a challenge regarding targets. The problem is not only systemically but also how women view themselves and their careers. Mentoring programmes for the Foreign Service include bringing in external private sector mentors for female diplomats. There are opportunities for part-time and flexible working for diplomats, although this limits career progression. There are efforts to change the working culture, including allowing staff to work wherever and whenever they want. There is Unconscious Bias training for all Foreign Service staff.

**Australia** welcomes the new UN Secretary-General's call for states to nominate equal men and women for senior posts. He is not the first Secretary-General to make these pledges, yet change has only been incremental. Australia is a member of the Geneva Group [the major donors to the UN budget], and when they met last month gender parity was discussed with all of the funds, programmes and agencies. It is important that the Group keeps focusing on gender parity. Australia also chaired the International Gender Champions Group, which has published a recent report that says that if states do not focus on gender nationally then there will not exist the pool of women needed to be appointed at the UN level. It is hypocritical of states to criticise the UN on gender if they are not doing thing themselves to improve the gender issue.

Australia targets 50% females in leadership positions in the public and private sectors. It has a system of champions encouraging women to apply for jobs, as well as a database of women seeking those jobs. Australia has a target of 40/40/20 by 2020. Within the Foreign Service all appointments and promotions panels must have gender balance, and everyone is required to undertake Unconscious Bias training. Women's networks and mentoring are also key tools. Australia consciously appoints women to head its delegations and Missions, and consciously supports other Missions to bring women in as interns and in other capacities.

**Iceland** is the leader of the WEF Global Gender Gap, but even then, there remains issues such as the 7.6% gender pay gap. The Government has an Action Plan on Gender Equality 2016-2019. Highlights include: gender mainstreaming, gender-responsive budget, gender quotas for company boards, gender equality complaint committee, equal parental leave, and affordable childcare. Despite this, there remain many challenges including: closing the gender pay-gap, women doing more unpaid work leading to twice the number of women to men relying solely on government pensions, eliminating gender-based violence, and the professions where women are in the majority remain undervalued. One key mechanism at the UN level in the HE-FOR-SHE – the PM of Iceland is an impact champion for this project. Barbershop Concept is also important to get men involved through the online toolbox (available at <http://www.heforshe.org/en/barbershop>).



## Session 2: Breakout Discussions

Questions posed at the beginning of small group discussions: (i) At what point has enough been done on gender? (ii) How and why should countries mentor other countries? (iii) Is there a way of mentoring the UN, for example through the Geneva Group or other avenues?

**Group 1** started off by discussing gender fatigue, noting that people are sick of hearing about these issues. It would be very helpful to have a greater push for gender mainstreaming. The Sustainable Development Goals, particularly indicators and reporting to the high-level forum, are all good pressure points for raising gender within the UN. There is a need to look at language such as 'gender mainstreaming' and 'intersectionality' in order to simplify it and provide more nuance. Programmes on gender at the national and international levels are in silos, and a more join-up approach is needed. Tied-funding or donor-driving could be a good way to ensure that more women are appointed to senior levels. Accountability for gender should occur at senior levels and should be personalised insofar as individuals are held to account for failing to ensure gender parity. The group questioned whether legal frameworks are useful in this regard. It is important to use case studies to elaborate how the gender issue can be addressed within technical areas. Accessibility of senior stage is very important regarding mainstreaming, and one suggestion is for speed-mentoring meeting on a bi-annual basis to ensure that accessibility occurs.

**Group 2** The Under-Secretary-General process is closed and opaque. There needs to be transparency in shortlists, and perhaps even elections for those posts. The UN needs to be a more attractive employer for women. There is a key role for mentors, especially giving women access to more senior networks. Countries ought to show leadership through women leaders in UN Missions. Countries that are more progressive should nominate more females for appointments in order to balance out the male ones from other countries.

**Group 3** emphasised that initiatives are needed to create safe spaces where women can share concerns and exchange capacity. The Young UN Initiative brings young staff together

to share their experiences, and this could provide a strong and positive model. It is important to be careful not to rely on short-term solutions such as only hiring women for a few years, because that only deals with the symptom and not with the problem.

**Group 4** was interested in the drop-off point for women, and why women leave at a certain point or have barriers from junior to senior levels. There are different models of mentoring: senior-junior, senior-senior, women-mentoring-senior-men, and so on. All of those have benefits and mentoring should be individualised. More could be done to mentor during the crucial time mid-career and to use the Pipeline for those women.

**General Discussion** focused on the aims of mentoring and how to link it to understanding structural obstacles. One key aim is to help a person get their next job. Mentors inculcate understanding on skills and knowledge that are important for hard power roles. Trying different things and exposure to new areas is key for building skills, which is a very important message for junior women to hear. Women tend to apply for jobs conservatively. Mentoring should aim to get women to think strategically and to move beyond their comfort zones. The aim should be to make women more ambitious in their own behaviour, to help them build a career path in their mind and then to think about the skills needed to get there. Individual and collective mentoring are both important. Getting beyond one-to-one as the sole model will help stimulate thinking about expertise, policy and energy. Collective mentoring builds tangible benefits for core groups rather than seeking to advance a single individual's career. Sponsoring is another interesting type of mentoring. An important component of mentoring is creating, establishing and maintaining networks. There is an important role for both government support and UN support through mentoring. Professional mentors and political mentors help women to navigate the dual system of their government and the UN. Mentoring regarding behaviour is also an important component for women. What happens in mentoring depends on personalities involved.

The second part of the discussion focused on mechanisms that can help to address the gender issue. In order to ensure that women are appointed into senior positions, there must be a focus on recruitment and on myth-busting. Human Resources needs to be able to look

across the whole map rather than just looking at piecemeal appointments. There must also be the myth-busting element that enables women to visualise themselves in specific roles and to apply for those posts. Creating formal mechanisms enables going beyond individual personalities or informal systems to create systemic change. Formal mechanisms give people access and exposure to skills that they need in order to progress. One example is Canada providing an empty chair in internal meetings so that Foreign Service junior staff can sit in the room and see/hear how decisions are made. Another formal mechanism is the Young Professional UN Programme that has a peer-to-peer annual meeting and provides mentoring, as is EMERGE – a pilot mentoring programme in Geneva that focuses on P3 level staff. The Women’s Talent Pipeline is a key formal mechanism; within DPA there is talent-spotting for special training for leadership; and there is also confidential peer-to-peer mentoring for heads of peacekeeping operations.

## Session 3: UN Entities Experiences

The third session focused on experiences of UN staff within different entities.

**UNFPA** has 51% female staff. There are policies on remote working practices and on compressed hours. Managers are held accountable for work-life balance through 360 degree reviews. Regional directors set their own policies, for example the director in Istanbul has a policy on no male-only panels or shortlists.

**ILO** struggles to place women in senior positions. The gap is most prevalent at the p4/p5 level. The ILO has implemented gender responsive practices to attempt to address this. These include: advertising in broader journals/networks, interview panels not “manels” i.e. made up of both male and female interviewers, incorporating flexible working hour patterns into work life routines, strict sexual harassment policies, crèche support and an ethics officer. The ILO has also adopted positive measures such as peer learning, networking, mentoring and unconscious bias training. Regional meetings are also held with women and they encourage upward feedback.

Although these measures and internal policies have been put in place, the ILO recognises that this is not enough. They acknowledge that more men are up for retirement than women, and that there is a lack of diversity, especially from under represented countries. The ILO suggests that it is necessary to change attitudes among mainly men line managers who are more comfortable with men in power. The practical realities of the experiences of women within the ILO were also discussed; women are not being given interesting assignments and although they are provided with coaching and support, most of the time they are left alone. Women are also difficult to actually locate in the first place- they are reluctant to apply for the senior roles.

Encouraging and discouraging practices were highlighted within the ILO. Encouraging practices included bringing in a Gender Equality Action Plan with accountability indicators and Geneva Gender Champions/commitments to gender equality by CEOs. Awards have also been granted to promote gender equality, such as the ILO recognition award and there has

been pressure internally from ILO employees for a more balanced representation on delegations. Discouraging practices were heavily based on attitudes, these included the tailoring of positions to suit male employees, office politics trumping merit and the concept of promotion based on seniority instead of merit. These practices make it difficult for women to progress up the ladder. In some UN agencies women are also offered consultant roles which can be described as precarious, non- standard work contracts. Family commitments and work life rigidity were also barriers to progression for female employee who have family responsibilities.

**OHCHR** we need to go back to basics and to Article 8 of the UN Charter. The UN is an equal opportunities employer, yet despite the plethora of reports and policies the facts remain depressing. Temporary special measures could and should be introduced. To address the issue within the UN, efforts need to place gender parity and geographical inclusivity hand in hand. To date, geographical considerations have trumped gender and this can no longer be the case: intersectionality is key. The Secretariat-General has claimed that by 2021, gender parity will be reached for men and women at senior leadership levels within the UN. But what does this actual mean and how will this be achieved? Positive discrimination? What impacts will this have?

The Secretariat-General needs to think carefully about engaging these efforts with all members of the UN. To do this, the UN should revise its approach to consultant positions; these positions, as noted by the ILO, are heavily occupied by women. These positions are less secure and offer less opportunity for progression. It should be noted that attractiveness to the positions within the UN are not the issue, it is accessibility. The UN should also develop their unconscious bias training and remove unconscious bias from employment opportunities- one such good practice is the removal of names from job applications. Sexual harassment within the workplace is also rife and this should be addressed. The implementation of policies that seriously tackle this issue will involve courage and accountability. We also need to widen our ideas of 'change' to include individual attitudes

held by women, for example, women are not confident in applying for senior roles and this should be addressed.

## Session 4: Breakout Discussions

Participants were asked to consider the following questions: (i) What single biggest recommendation could be done? (ii) What positive lessons can be championed by states? (iii) How can states be encouraged to champion initiatives? (iv) How and whom can be accountable at the UN? (v) If the UN was a country, what would we say about its gender issues?

Some participants suggested the USA as a country comparable to the UN: this was because like the USA, the UN has a commitment to gender parity but approaches within individual bodies are not consistent, and indeed parity is rarely fulfilled. The general feedback from the groups was that if the UN was a country it would not rank that badly. However, concrete steps are needed to address and improve the gender question. It is important to go back to the statistics on gender and see what, if anything, can be done to support the Secretary-General on the gender issue. It was suggested that we ought to look to states with female ambassadors for leadership on this issue, particularly the Latin American states and the Nordic countries. It is crucial to include non-Western states, and to use countries that have gender champions. Security Council members seized of the Women, Peace & Security agenda should be leaders on the internal UN gender question. There needs to be accountability at the UN, perhaps through an Under Secretary-General for implementing gender equality measures that already exist. The Commission on the Status of Women could be used more strategically in relation to this issue.

Three key proposals are (i) accountability (individual and organisational), (ii) statistics, and (iii) qualitative data. Accountability requires thought about the types of mechanisms needed. Accountability needs to occur at the top of the system, and should focus both on reporting and on consequences. Accountability is also important in affirming action: it seems that theoretically, and discursively, gender parity is high on the agenda, but this needs actioned through accountable bodies. One way to improve statistical data is through the mapping exercise that will occur via a Network Member's initiative this summer. Those statistics need to be shared and made available publicly. Qualitative data should focus both

on women's experiences within the UN and also experiences of women who left the UN, or those who chose not to apply for UN jobs or who were not appointed for a job. The aim is to see whether perceptions of the latter map onto the experiences of those within the UN. Key issues will be access and cooperation.

### **Session 5: Group of Friends of Gender Parity**

The UK has taken a leadership role amongst the P5 in relation to gender and appointments. The attached PowerPoint shows the statistical breakdown for gender and the P5 countries. There is significant support at the highest domestic levels for this agenda. The UK is a member of the Group of Friends of Gender Parity, which includes 90 of the 193 UN member states. The Group is led by Colombia and has very diverse membership. It is a forum for discussing and supporting UN initiatives on gender. The Global Call from that group launched this year's campaign to get women into high-level jobs within peacekeeping operations. Nominations can be made by states, institutions or individuals. States were asked to nominate at least two women. The UK sponsored the campaign and nominate four women. Having women in peacekeeping operations is about more than gender parity but about a way of creating sustainable peace. The UK will remain a leader on gender by practising what it preaches, nominating and appointing women, building a robust pipeline of female candidates, and exploring opportunities for joint projects with other member states to increase the talent pool.