


## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY




**G**lobal commitments to gender equality in public life are not new. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 and the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 have called for the equal participation of women and men in public life, decision-making and policy formation, and have urged governments to take action to close gender gaps.

**Equality and diversity at all levels and in all sectors of public administration improves government function, makes governments more responsive and accountable to diverse public interests, enhances the quality of services delivered, and increases trust and confidence in public organizations.** Public administration is responsible for shaping, translating and implementing public policy, and providing public services to its citizens. Public administrators provide input on policies as they are crafted, decide how to structure essential government operations, and influence the substance and quality of service delivery. Ensuring that public administration is representative of its population means that a country's citizenry is broadly engaged in these important functions.

**Gender equality is at the core of an inclusive and accountable public administration.** As half of every country's population, women have the right to equal employment in their governments across all levels, sectors and positions. Often the largest single employer, public administration must assume the responsibility to mainstream gender equality. Public administration has the potential to model inclusive institutions, where women and men equally participate and lead, and to accelerate development for all.

**The COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on populations, governments and economies, particularly in exacerbating gender inequalities, underscore the importance of inclusive public administration that addresses the needs of women and girls, especially those facing multiple forms of discrimination.** More than before, governments are being judged and evaluated for the effectiveness and responsiveness of their services during an unprecedented public health crisis. COVID-19's effects are not gender-neutral, and it is crucial that governments respond to the needs, rights and expectations of women and girls. Women must therefore have a seat at the table when governments are crafting their policy responses. Policies need to be gender-responsive and recognize women's right to be decision makers.

**Despite global commitments, across the world, however, gender equality in public administration has been more an aspiration than a reality.** Historically, patriarchal cultures and practices have undermined gender



equality in public administration. While women are well-represented in public administration in many countries, they remain significantly outnumbered by men in leadership and decision-making positions. Furthermore, a lack of data and measures to assess gender equality in public administration have hampered progress towards evidence-based policy change.

**Facing these challenges at a global level, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) spearheaded the global Gender Equality in Public Administration (GEPA) initiative in 2011.** The GEPA initiative aims to:

- support women's empowerment and expanded participation and leadership in public institutions;
- contribute to the availability of up-to-date information on gender equality in public administration and of evidence and analysis to facilitate informed policy and decision-making.

The initiative first produced 13 case studies and a global report in 2014, setting a baseline for what is known about gender equality in public administration around the world and generating a set of recommendations to spur change.

**Progress towards gender equality in public administration requires high-quality and up-to-date data on gender equality in the civil service around the world.** This effort is being advanced by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which calls for “women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life” and “responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels” through Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 and 16. Global indicator SDG16.7.1b will enable the collection and dissemination of data to evaluate progress towards gender parity in participation and representation in public administration, including in leadership.

## Report methodology

**This report provides a new global stocktaking of progress towards gender equality in public administration worldwide.** It is an outcome of a six-year collaboration between UNDP and the Gender Inequality Research Lab (GIRL) at the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) on the GEPA initiative. The analysis of gender equality in public administration draws upon Gender Parity in Civil Service (Gen-PaCS), a new global cross-national dataset of publicly available data and statistics on public administration. Publicly available statistics are complemented by data provided directly to UNDP or to GIRL at the University of Pittsburgh in support of the GEPA initiative and spans 170 countries.

**The Gen-PaCS dataset includes publicly available statistics published by countries.** Data availability varies by measure: the share of women in public administration is the most widely reported, whereas intersectional data (e.g. data disaggregated by gender and age, or gender and disability) is less often reported. Decision-making statistics also vary widely, and these variations are considered in the report. Data availability also varies over time. Throughout the report, current figures on women’s participation in public administration use the most recent year of data available beginning in 2015. Because countries report statistics in different years, changes over time in a statistic reflect both differences in the sample of countries included and changes within countries over time.



**Parity – equal numbers of women and men employed and leading in public administration – is an important indicator of progress on gender equality.** This single measure does not capture the whole of gender equality, which is the greater goal in public institutions. Neither does this measure acknowledge the intersectional needs of women, including; those with disabilities; racial and ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples; and those who face discrimination based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or age. Where possible, the report complements quantitative assessments of progress towards gender parity with qualitative assessments of policies, practices and institutional culture. It also highlights UNDP initiatives, such as the Gender Equality Seal for Public Institutions and regional assessments.

## Key findings

- **Around the world, on average, gender parity among civil servants is within reach.** Using the most recent data available in each country, women’s participation in public administration globally averages 46 percent.
- **There is substantial variation across countries and regions.** The lowest share of women in public administration in the world is at 6 percent and the highest at 77 percent. Less than one third (32 percent) of countries are at or near gender parity. Women are numerically overrepresented in 28 percent of countries and remain underrepresented in 39 percent of countries.
- **Women’s participation in public administration in fragile and conflict-affected countries averages just 23 percent, less than half of the same figure in all other countries.** One potential explanation is that conflict increases the physical and personal insecurities of government workers, which could drive sharp declines in women civil service workers in conflict-affected areas.
- **Women around the world continue to be underrepresented in decision-making levels.** Women are 38 percent of managers and 31 percent of top leaders. Overall, these averages reveal a familiar pattern: as the level of decision-making power and influence increases, women’s numbers decline. Unless addressed directly, ‘glass ceilings’ will continue to prevent women from advancing to the highest levels of leadership.
- **Women remain concentrated in some policy areas and starkly underrepresented in others.** While women’s numbers are highest in ministries focused on women’s issues, health and education, they are underrepresented in 15 of the 20 policy areas, with Public Works and Transportation reporting the lowest share of women. These ‘glass walls’ are likely limiting women’s influence on policymaking and their ability to effect change overall.
- **Progress towards gender parity is evident in three high-profile policy areas traditionally considered the domain of men: ministries of defence, foreign affairs and finance.** Globally, women average 41 percent of finance ministries, 40 percent of foreign affairs ministries, and 36 percent of defence ministries. Between 2010 and 2020, women’s average share of positions increased by 11 percentage points in ministries of defence, 6 in foreign affairs, and 10 in finance. Still, sizeable gender gaps in these high-profile areas remain in some countries, particularly in defence ministries.
- **In most parts of the world, women’s participation in environmental protection ministries remains low.** Women’s participation in ministries of environmental protection averages 33 percent globally – among the



lowest of the 20 policy areas included in this report. Parity in decision-making in environmental protection is exceptionally rare. Over time, there is little evidence that countries are making substantial progress towards gender parity in environmental protection ministries.

- **Worldwide, women play a limited role in health policy decision-making, including on taskforces charged with responding to COVID-19 pandemic.** Health ministries and agencies are playing an outsized role in the current climate, and women are 58 percent of employees in health ministries. But only 31 percent of ministers of health, and 34 percent of the broader set of decision-making positions in health ministries around the world are women. Women average 27 percent of COVID-19 task force positions and make up of only 18 percent of taskforce leadership. Only 6 percent of COVID-19 task forces are at or near gender parity, and 11 percent consist exclusively of men.
- **COVID-19 falls into a paradox that has defined other recent public health crises.** On the one hand, a handful of high-profile women have been visible and acclaimed leaders; on the other hand, women and gender are often conspicuously invisible from government strategy, policy, practice and public discourse around the crisis response. The UNDP-UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker showed that as of September 2020, only one in eight countries had measures in place to protect women against the social and economic impacts of the pandemic.
- **COVID-19 can also become a means to catapult public institutions from ‘business-as-usual’ into ‘building back better’ by making them more representative of the societies they serve.** When public institutions become more gender-inclusive and diverse at the highest decision-making levels, they also become more representative of the societies they serve, and more democratic, pertinent and efficient in the policies they produce.
- **Gender equality is more than parity between women and men.** Women and men must reflect the diversity of the publics they represent. For public institutions to become more representative of the publics they serve, they must include representation from women who face varying forms of exclusion and marginalization, including; those with disabilities; racial and ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples; and those who face discrimination based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or age. Reimagining and redesigning more inclusive and diverse public administrations are only possible by collecting and processing data and statistics in ways that acknowledge the diversity of public administration employees and decision makers.
- **Although still not universally available, gender-disaggregated public administration data are now more available, accessible and of higher quality than ever before.** The progress over the past ten years is indicative of what can be achieved, and why this is necessary. National measurement and reporting against global indicator SDG16.7.1b on representation in public administration aims to further improve the availability and quality of sex-disaggregated data.



## Policy recommendations

The report provides five sets of recommendations to advance gender equality in public administration:

### 1. Promote synergies with the broader gender equality agenda.

- **Develop national gender equality plans with concrete mechanisms for implementation and accountability.** Support efforts to track budget allocations for gender equality, including in public administration, and to strengthen national oversight, monitoring, evaluation and accountability.
- **Develop evidence-based correlation between gender equality in public administration, inclusive institutions and quality public policy outcomes for all.** Raise awareness of the importance of women's equal participation and decision-making in public administration.
- **Support women's education and preparedness for civil service careers, with a focus on young women.** Promote equal education of girls and boys, young women and men, at primary, secondary and tertiary levels.
- **Contribute to women's visibility and gender equality in traditional and social media.** Showcase examples of successful and inspiring women in public administration.

### 2. Strengthen constitutional, legislative and policy frameworks.

- **Harmonize laws and national action plans governing public administration with the Beijing Platform for Action's commitments.** This includes gender balance in public administration to advance women's full participation in public life and decision-making.
- **Ensure that provisions that promote gender equality are included in drafting processes in constitutional reviews.** Legislation and policy must be grounded in international norms and standards, including CEDAW. A constitutional framework can tackle power asymmetries in society and can lead the way to concrete national legislation for quota laws in public administration.
- **Develop gender equality laws to uphold gender equality as a national priority.** Mainstream gender equality throughout legislation, including laws on equal pay for work of the same value, and laws on sexual harassment and prevention of gender-based violence.
- **Consider quotas across public bodies and temporary special measures (TSMs).** This includes targeted recruitment, hiring and promotion, in line with Article 4 of CEDAW. TSMs in public administration build a pipeline of qualified women candidates to move into decision-making.
- **Create a national gender budget and national gender equality plan.** Involve the national gender machinery with other ministries to implement commitments to gender equality in public administration.

### 3. Support institutional change within public administration.

- **Re-imagine the public administration post-COVID-19 to position gender equality as central.** Harness the opportunity for public policy institutions to build back more gender-responsive societies, economies



and governments. Develop innovative public policies for gender equality, such as counting unpaid care in national accounting systems, universal social and care services, transforming social norms through fiscal policies (e.g. parental leave, taxation benefits, public transfers) and reforming the segregation of the labour market.

- **Incorporate women's voices, needs and rights into pandemic recovery planning and decision-making to ensure more gender-responsive policies.** Governments must ensure equal participation in decision-making institutions as a pre-condition to democracy and development.
- **Challenge and reform the overall workplace culture in public administration.** Ensure commitment to gender equality by 'walking the talk'. Public administration should model a gender-responsive senior management culture.
- **Penalize sexism and harassment in institutional cultures.** These are major barriers to gender equality in public administration. Make the workplace a safe, respectful space for all and set out clear processes for reporting sexism and harassment, including online harassment.
- **Promote work-life balance for women and men.** This can affirm gender equality in the workplace and transform the culture of senior management into one that is gender-inclusive. Introduce work-life policies for women and men that recognize and value the care roles women undertake disproportionately while supporting efforts to redistribute care work. Flexible working arrangements must be accompanied by other measures, such as state-led provision of affordable child-care and supporting shifts in social norms towards a more equal division of labour at home.
- **Implement inclusive and transparent human resources policies.** These include gender-responsive recruitment and selection procedures, such as recruitment targets, gender-balanced recruitment and promotions panels, gender training for recruitment managers and targeted outreach to women.
- **Reform performance evaluation processes to ensure that women's careers are not held back by gender discrimination.** Include gender-responsive goals in managerial performance criteria.
- **Support capacity-building for managers and all employees on gender-responsive practices.** This includes training to address gender biases for all.
- **Invest in leadership training and professional development of women public administration employees to address the gender gap in senior management levels.**
- **Break down glass walls to ensure women's participation at all levels of decision-making across different line ministries.** This is particularly important where complex policy challenges such as the nature-climate crisis require a diverse set of decision-making bodies.
- **Invest in capacity-building and technical assistance for gender mainstreaming specifically in sectors dominated by men, such as the energy, mining, environment and climate change.**
- **Build capacity on gender mainstreaming across public administration.** Strengthen the capacity of civil servants on gender mainstreaming and COVID-19 and crisis response.
- **Implement initiatives such as the UNDP Gender Equality Seal for Public Institutions that support organizations to 'walk the talk.'**
- **Track GEPA good practices to inform policy and programming.** UNDP will continue to build a database of UNDP Country Offices' support to GEPA programmes.



#### **4. Strengthen commitment to data availability to track progress on women in decision making in public service, SDG 16 and Agenda 2030.**

- **Commit to investments in quality data collection (and the availability of data) on gender parity in public administration to support evidence-based policy and programming.** Both the Gen-PaCS database and country-level efforts aim to strengthen data collection systems for reporting on SDG 16.7.1b. This supports tracking achievement of Target 16.7 of SDG 16 that aims to ensure “responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.”
- **Support Member States’ commitment to carry out Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).** Collect and analyse intersectional data on the inequalities faced by women in participation and leadership in public administration and develop solutions to achieve the SDGs.

#### **5. Leverage partnerships and convening power to build strong global, regional and national partnerships for organizational change.**

- **Improve coordination among United Nations entities and partners,** and ensure that gender equality is integrated into interagency groups on public administration.
- **Work in partnership to increase women’s leadership and decision-making in climate negotiations.**
- **Foster partnerships with actors in politics and business who are also working on gender equality.** While not always directly focused on women in public administration, work in these institutions creates an enabling environment to influence outcomes for gender equality in public administration and vice versa.
- **Partner with UN Women on women’s leadership and participation in public life.** Build on good practice of UN Women’s programmes on leadership and political participation for work on GEPA.
- **Collaborate with other important partners including iKNOW Politics.**
- **Engage with the UN System-wide Action Plan for Mainstreaming Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.** This supports gender equality and organizational change.
- **Harness new partnerships to challenge social norms that restrict women’s participation in public life and decision-making.** Work with community and religious leaders and men champions to tackle harmful social norms.
- **Invest in non-government organizations and women’s movements.** NGOs working on women’s participation in decision-making in public life are important for efforts to change social norms hampering gender equality.
- **Utilize convening power to work with partners to build more gender-responsive public institutions.** UNDP will facilitate a global community of practitioners around the UNDP Gender Equality Seal for Public Institutions and GEPA to incentivize public institutions to meet rigorous standards through an action plan for improving public policies, programmes and budgets, leadership and enabling work environments. This will build inclusive and accountable governance through gender-responsive institutions and policies.