

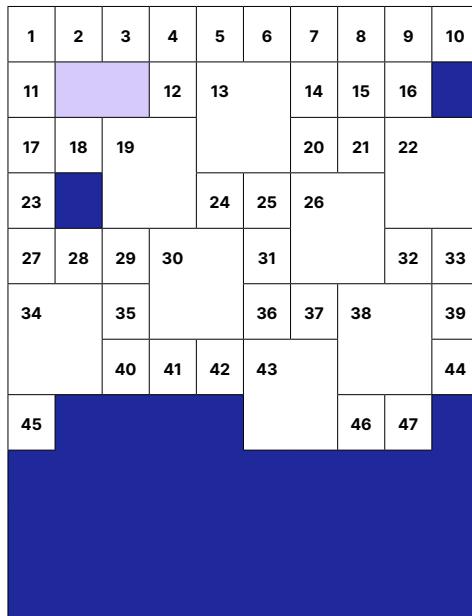


Women in Multilateralism 2026

The unfinished quest
for gender parity

COVER PAGE IMAGES OF CANDIDATES FOR UN SECRETARY-GENERAL

- 1 **Endekachew Makonnen** Ethiopia / Year of candidacy: 1971
- 2 **Javier Pérez de Cuéllar** Perú / Year of candidacy: 1981
- 3 **Ashraf Ghani** Afghanistan / Year of candidacy: 2006
- 4 **António Guterres** Portugal / Year of candidacy: 2016
- 5 **Trygve Lie** Norway / Year of candidacy: 1946
- 6 **Danilo Türk** Slovenia / Year of candidacy: 2016
- 7 **Miroslav Lajčák** Slovakia / Year of candidacy: 2016
- 8 **Ban Ki-moon** Republic of Korea / Year of candidacy: 2006
- 9 **Olusegun Obasanjo** Nigeria / Year of candidacy: 1991
- 10 **Boutros Boutros-Ghali** Egypt / Year of candidacy: 1996
- 11 **Prince Zeid Ra'ad** Jordan / Year of candidacy: 2006 / Wikimedia Commons - Foreign and Commonwealth Office CC BY 2.0.
- 12 **Dag Hammarskjöld** Sweden / Year of candidacy: 1953
- 13 **Irina Bokova** Bulgaria / Year of candidacy: 2016
- 14 **Luis Padilla Nervo** Mexico / Year of candidacy: 1953
- 15 **Kurt Waldheim** Austria / Year of candidacy: 1971
- 16 **Mongi Slim** Tunisia / Year of candidacy: 1962
- 17 **Shashi Tharoor** India / Year of candidacy: 2006 / Wikimedia Commons - Chatham House CC BY 2.0.
- 18 **Gunnar Jarring** Sweden / Year of candidacy: 1971 / Wikimedia Commons - Unknown author CC BY 4.0.
- 19 **Christiana Figueres** Costa Rica / Year of candidacy: 2016
- 20 **Lester B. Pearson** Canada / Year of candidacy: 1953
- 21 **Carlos P. Romulo** Philippines / Year of candidacy: 1953
- 22 **Kristalina Georgieva** Bulgaria / Year of candidacy: 2016 / Wikimedia Commons - World Bank Group - Grant Ellis CC BY-SA 4.0.
- 23 **Max Jakobson** Finland / Year of candidacy: 1971 / Wikimedia Commons - Teemu Rajala CC BY 3.0.
- 24 **U Thant** Burma (Myanmar) / Year of candidacy: 1962 / Wikimedia Commons - Jack de Nijs CC BY-SA 3.0 NL.
- 25 **Jayantha Dhanapala** Sri Lanka / Year of candidacy: 2006 / Wikimedia Commons - The Official CTBTO Photostream CC BY 2.0
- 26 **Vesna Pusić** Croatia / Year of candidacy: 2016 / Vlada Republike Hrvatske CC BY 2.0 Genérica.
- 27 **Carlos Ortiz de Rozas** Argentina / Year of candidacy: 1971
- 28 **Kofi Annan** Ghana / Year of candidacy: 1996
- 29 **Elco van Kleffens** Netherlands / Year of candidacy: 1946
- 30 **Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga** Latvia / Year of candidacy: 2006 / Wikimedia Commons - Saeima, edited version by Blowwhite CC BY-SA 2.0.
- 31 **Wincenty Rzymowski** Poland / Year of candidacy: 1953



- 32 **Igor Lukšić** Montenegro / Year of candidacy: 2016 / Government of Montenegro CC BY-SA 3.0 Unported.
- 33 **Vuk Jeremić** Serbia / Year of candidacy: 2016 / Wikimedia Commons - Južne vesti CC BY 3.0 Unported.
- 34 **Natalia Gherman** Moldova / Year of candidacy: 2016 / Wikimedia Commons - Das österreichische Außenministerium CC BY 2.0.
- 35 **Bernard Chidzero** Zimbabwe / Year of candidacy: 1991 / UN Photo - Yutaka Nagata
- 36 **Hamilton Shirley Amerasinghe** Sri Lanka / Year of candidacy: 1971 / UN Photo - Yutaka Nagata
- 37 **Nasrollah Entezam** Iran / Year of candidacy: 1953 / UN Photo - PCD
- 38 **Helen Clark** New Zealand / Year of candidacy: 2016
- 39 **Srgjan Kerim** North Macedonia / Year of candidacy: 2016 / UN Photo - Devra Berkowitz
- 40 **Gladwyn Jebb** United Kingdom / Year of candidacy: 1946 / UN Photo - MB
- 41 **Stanoje Simić** Yugoslavia / Year of candidacy: 1953
- 42 **Henri Bonnet** France / Year of candidacy: 1946
- 43 **Susana Malcorra** Argentina / Year of candidacy: 2016
- 44 **Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan** Iran / Year of candidacy: 1971 / Wikimedia Commons - Erling Mandelmann CC BY-SA 3.0.
- 45 **Salim Ahmed Salim** Tanzania / Year of candidacy: 1981 / Wikimedia Commons - World Economic Forum - Aly Ramji CC BY-SA 2.0
- 46 **Felipe Herrera** Chile / Year of candidacy: 1971 / Wikimedia Commons - Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile CC BY-SA 3.0 Chile.
- 47 **Surakiart Sathirathai** Thailand / Year of candidacy: 2006



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Introduction

Eighty years after the founding of the United Nations, the promise of equality that animated its creation remains only partially fulfilled. Around the world, women now lead nations, corporations, universities, and global movements, yet they remain underrepresented across nearly all spaces of power, both public and private. The multilateral system is not an exception; although it has made more progress than many sectors, it still reflects an earlier era in key positions of leadership.

GWL Voices was created by women who have lived this imbalance firsthand, women who were themselves candidates for Secretary-General of the United Nations. Today the organization brings together 79 members from 39 countries, reflecting a wide range of regions and experiences. Together, we founded GWL Voices to accelerate the transformation we once sought from inside the system. Our goal is a multilateral order that represents the societies it serves and unleashes the full potential of women's leadership.

Through the *Women in Multilateralism* yearly flagship report, **we have built an evidence base that makes visible what is too often invisible: who holds power across international organizations, and who does not.** Each edition has added a new perspective on where women stand in the global hierarchy, from the heads and senior management of multilateral institutions, to the diplomats who speak for member states at the United Nations. These analyses have



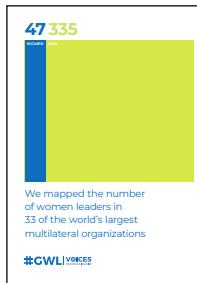
WE FOUNDED
GWL VOICES TO
ACCELERATE THE
TRANSFORMATION
WE ONCE SOUGHT
FROM INSIDE

revealed patterns of progress and resistance, and reminded us that only sustained scrutiny can compel accountability. They also underline a simple truth: **meaningful institutional change requires leadership that brings a wider range of experiences and approaches to global decision-making.**

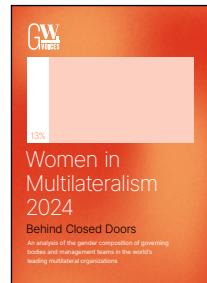
The 2026 edition of *Women in Multilateralism* turns the lens toward the most consequential post of all: the Secretary-General of the United Nations. As the world approaches the organization's 80th anniversary and prepares to elect the UN's next leader, we present a comprehensive account of the gender of every known candidate for this position since 1945. What might seem a straightforward exercise, listing who has run for the UN's top job, required extensive research and verification. **The result is a dataset that exposes eight decades of underrepresentation: of more than 40 candidates to this position, only eight have been women.** Not a single female candidate was officially considered during the UN's first six decades.

WOMEN IN MULTILATERALISM: FOUR YEARS OF EXPANDING INSIGHT

WIM23



WIM24



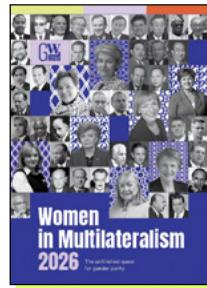
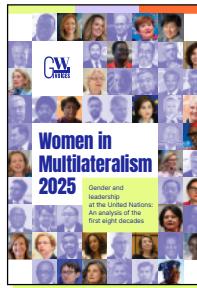
**1 indicator,
33 organizations**

Established the first baseline, mapping women's representation at the top of major multilateral institutions.

**3 indicators,
54 organizations**

Delivered the first comprehensive view of women's representation across heads, senior management teams and governing bodies.

WIM25



**4 indicators,
54 organizations**

Introduced the first historical analysis of all Permanent Representatives to the UN since 1945.

**4 indicators,
62 organizations**

Adds a deep historical review of UN Secretary-General elections and expands all previous analyses.

This long pattern does not reflect a lack of qualified women. On the contrary, it highlights how narrow assumptions about leadership have shaped the field of candidates, even as women around the world have led complex institutions and navigated global challenges.

This history is not a footnote or a singular anomaly. It reflects how long-standing gender norms have shaped leadership opportunities and highlights the ongoing need to broaden access to positions of influence. Alongside this new analysis of the UN Secretary-General election, *Women in Multilateralism 2026* continues to track four key indicators: the gender of UN Permanent Representatives, and the gender of the heads, senior management teams, and members of governing bodies in 62 international organizations. **While we are gratified that these figures show incremental and steady gains in gender parity in some leadership posts, the data also exposes continued underrepresentation of women in the bodies where governments make decisions.**

Eighty years on, the evidence is clear: **the principles of equality written into the UN Charter will remain incomplete until they are reflected in its highest office.** The UN's founding commitment to equal rights was shaped by women who understood that leadership matters. Today, that principle remains as relevant as ever.

Madam Secretary-General? The 80-year history of a principle deferred

Since its founding in 1945, the United Nations has aspired to represent “We the peoples,” as stated in the preamble to its Charter, embodying values of equality, justice, and shared responsibility. Yet for its entire history, the organization’s most important leadership position, the Secretary-General, has been exclusively held by men.

At a time when women excel as heads of state, chief executives of global corporations and chancellors of leading universities, this glaring anachronism is more striking than ever.

THE EIGHT WOMEN WHO HAVE RUN FOR UN SECRETARY-GENERAL IN EIGHT DECADES

Helen Clark
GWL Voices
Co-Founder



Susana Malcorra
GWL Voices
Co-Founder



Irina Bokova
GWL Voices
Co-Founder



Christiana Figueres
GWL Voices
Member



**Natalia
Gherman Wien**



**Kristalina
Georgieva**



**Vaira Vike
Freiberg**



Vesna Pusic



The absence of women in this role is even more discordant when contrasted with the spirit and letter of the UN Charter. At the 1945 San Francisco Conference of 1945, where delegates gathered to define the scope and rules for this new organization, **a handful of visionary women ensured that the global movement toward women's rights was powerfully reflected in the UN founding document.** Delegates Bertha Lutz of Brazil, Minerva Bernardino of the Dominican Republic, Wu Yi-fang from China, and Isabel Pinto de Vidal of Uruguay led the effort to guarantee that the Charter would enshrine the phrase “equal rights of men and women.” They also successfully fought for the Charter, in its Article 8, to explicitly guarantee that men and women are equally eligible to participate in all the United Nations organs, including in leadership positions.

Lutz, Bernardino, Yi-fang, and Pinto de Vidal and other women in San Francisco were not pushing a radical agenda; they were simply echoing the international movement for gender equality that had been building since the 1920s, when after decades of activism, parliaments around the world began passing laws that guaranteed women’s right to vote.

Another trailblazing figure in the UN’s early history was Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit of India. In 1953, she became the first woman elected President of the UN General Assembly, a prestigious role that rotates annually among member states. That same year, Pandit was even discussed as a possible candidate for Secretary-General. While her candidacy did not materialize into a formal bid, Pandit’s stature demonstrated that women’s leadership at the very highest levels of the UN was imaginable, if not yet attainable.

Yet even as the principle of women’s leadership was enshrined in the UN charter and embodied by leaders like Pandit, a wide variety of factors prevented women from actually serving in the role of Secretary-General. **In fact, according to official UN data, during the first seven elections for this position, all 28 candidates were men.** Not one government nominated a woman candidate. This long record

naturally raises a simple question for the multilateral system: **if qualified women have long existed, why not consider them for the UN's top role?**

It would take until 2006, more than 60 years after the UN's founding, for this to happen for the first time. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, then President of Latvia, was the sole female candidate in that race, standing out as a symbolic but isolated presence in a process dominated by men.

A full decade later, **in 2016, the UN introduced a more transparent selection process and for the first time in history, women candidates not only participated in meaningful numbers, they actually outnumbered men.** The race featured 13 candidates in total, including seven highly accomplished women. Among them were Helen Clark, Susana Malcorra and Irina Bokova, all founding members of GWL Voices, whose leadership experience spanned prime ministerial roles, foreign ministries and major UN agencies. They were joined by Christiana Figueres, Natalia Gherman, Vesna Pusić and Kristalina Georgieva, four leaders who had shaped international policy from the highest levels of national government, global institutions and major multilateral negotiations. Out of all the women who have ever officially run for this office, seven did so in 2016.

This race also revealed the global breadth of seasoned women leaders.

Female candidates hailed from Argentina, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, Croatia, Latvia, Moldova, and New Zealand, representing different regions, languages, and political traditions. Their participation broke new ground, making abundantly clear that leadership of the UN should no longer be a male preserve. Although ultimately a man, António Guterres of Portugal, was selected, **the prominence of female contenders set a crucial precedent, and their strong performances altered expectations surrounding the position.**

**THE PROMINENCE
OF FEMALE
CONTENDERS
SET A CRUCIAL
PRECEDENT**



EIGHTY YEARS OF CANDIDATES FOR THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL



Gladwyn Jebb



Henri Bonnet



Eelco van Kleffens



Trygve Lie



Mongi Slim



U Thant



Carlos Ortiz de Rozas



Endelkachew Makonnen



Max Jakobson



Gunnar Jarring



Felipe Herrera



Hamilton Shirley Amerasinghe



Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan



Salim Ahmed Salim



Kurt Waldheim



Javier Pérez de Cuéllar



1946



1953



1962



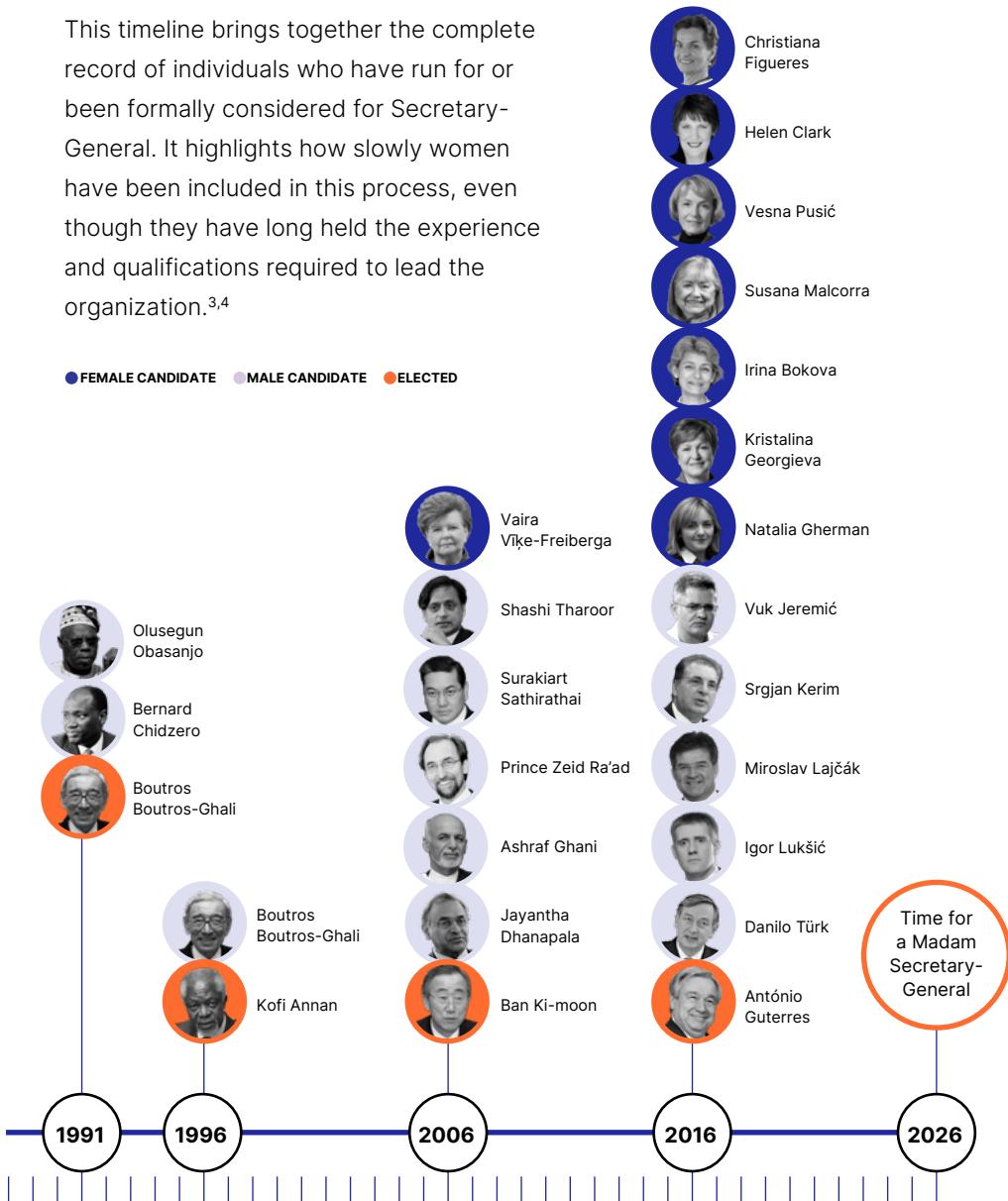
1971



1981

This timeline brings together the complete record of individuals who have run for or been formally considered for Secretary-General. It highlights how slowly women have been included in this process, even though they have long held the experience and qualifications required to lead the organization.^{3,4}

● FEMALE CANDIDATE ● MALE CANDIDATE ● ELECTED



3 This timeline reflects only official candidacies per UN official data.

4 This timeline does not include re-elections.

Any effort to understand the UN's failure to nominate or elect women for the Secretary-General position must also acknowledge the central role of the Security Council. The five permanent members (the U.S., Russia, China, France, and the U.K.) hold veto power over candidates. This obviously constrains the ability of even a large alliance of member states to push for a particular candidate. While the General Assembly formally appoints the Secretary-General, it can only do so based on the Council's recommendation. **For candidates, this creates a steep hurdle: no matter how strong their global support, their chances ultimately hinge on being acceptable to all five permanent members.**

Nevertheless, it is not impossible to imagine political circumstances that would make all five permanent members of the Security Council rally around a female candidate.

In any scenario, we are confident that a significant number of women will be considered for this position in 2026. If the 2016 election is any guide, women's candidacies will not be treated as anomalies but will instead shape expectations and introduce new ideas during the election process. As those expectations evolve, it is worth recalling that merit has always been the basis for selecting a Secretary-General, even when not mentioned as emphatically as today. A cohort of highly qualified women would clearly meet that standard; the challenge is to ensure that assessments of merit are made fairly, without bias or discrimination.

**THE UNFINISHED
STORY OF WOMEN
CANDIDATES FOR
SECRETARY-GENERAL
IS ULTIMATELY ABOUT
THE CREDIBILITY OF
THE UN ITSELF**



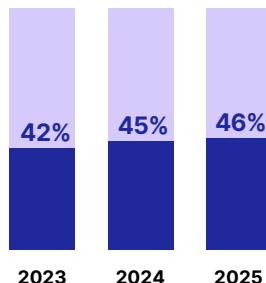
Ensuring that leadership at the highest level reflects the diversity of the world's peoples would reinforce the UN's credibility and its ability to speak with authority on equality. Ultimately, the unfinished story of women candidates for Secretary-General underscores this point: the institution cannot fully represent the world's peoples until it reflects their diversity at the very top.

2025: Updates on progress toward gender parity in the multilateral system

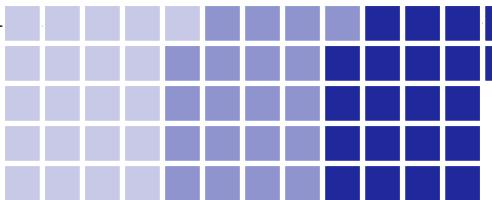
As debates over equality and cooperation grow sharper around the world, GWL Voices continues to monitor who holds power at the heart of the multilateral system. Our annual analysis now covers 62 organizations, expanding the scope of our tracking to capture a fuller picture of leadership across international institutions. **This year's data show progress that**

feels both significant and fragile. The share of these multilateral organizations currently headed by a woman is now at 46%, nearly at parity, compared with 45% in 2024 and 42% in 2023. We found that 21 of these organizations have never had a woman at the helm, and 20 more have done so only once. Together, these figures highlight both the advances achieved and the distance that remains toward consistent gender balance in leadership.

Share of female heads in 62 multilateral organizations



21 organizations have never been run by a woman



21 organizations have elected a woman more than once

20 organizations have elected a woman to the top job only once



A HISTORY OF TOP LEADERSHIP AT 62 MULTILATERAL ORGANIZATIONS

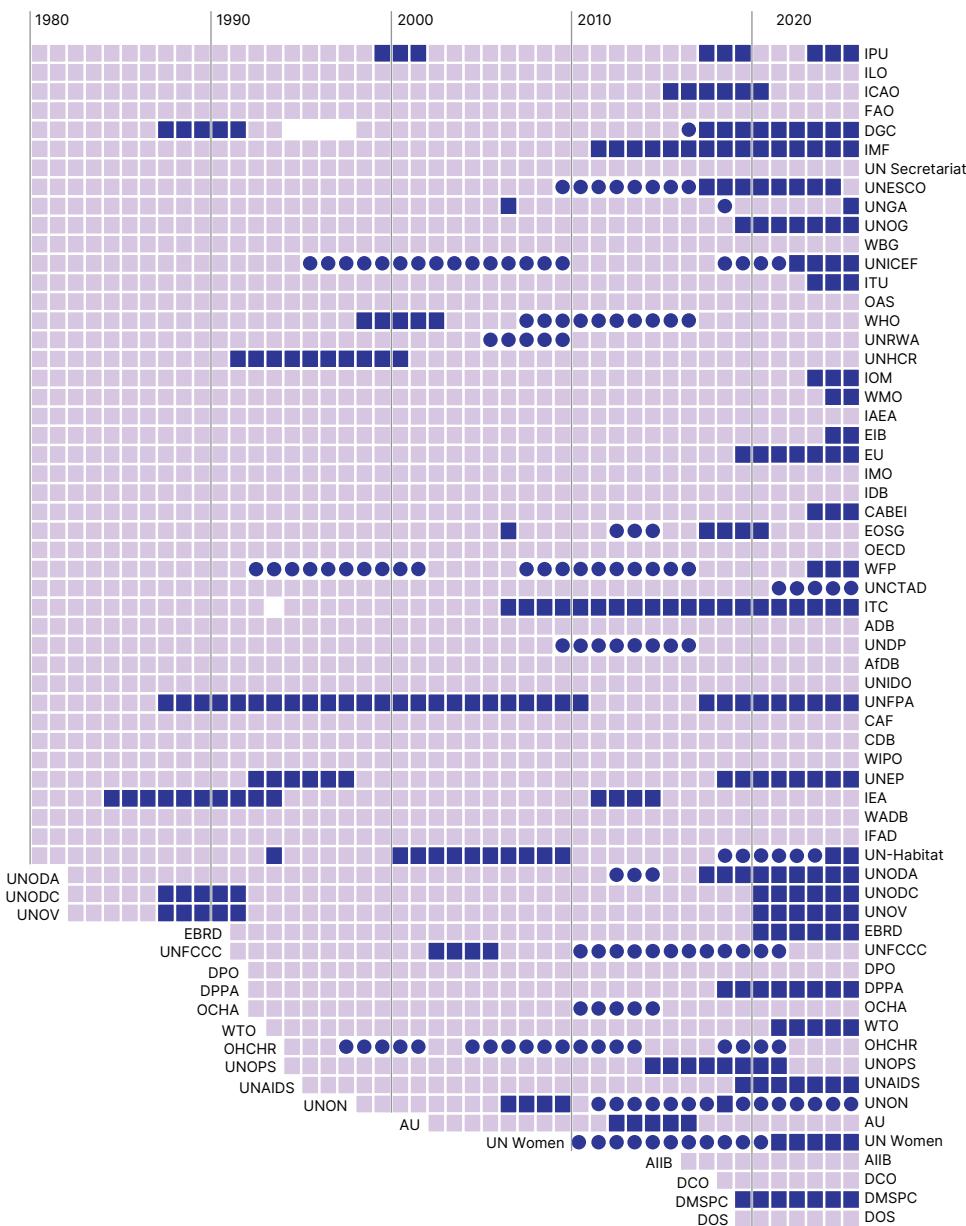
Female and male heads by year since 1945

We speak from experience

26 GWL Voices members have led 17
of these organizations

█ FEMALE █ MALE

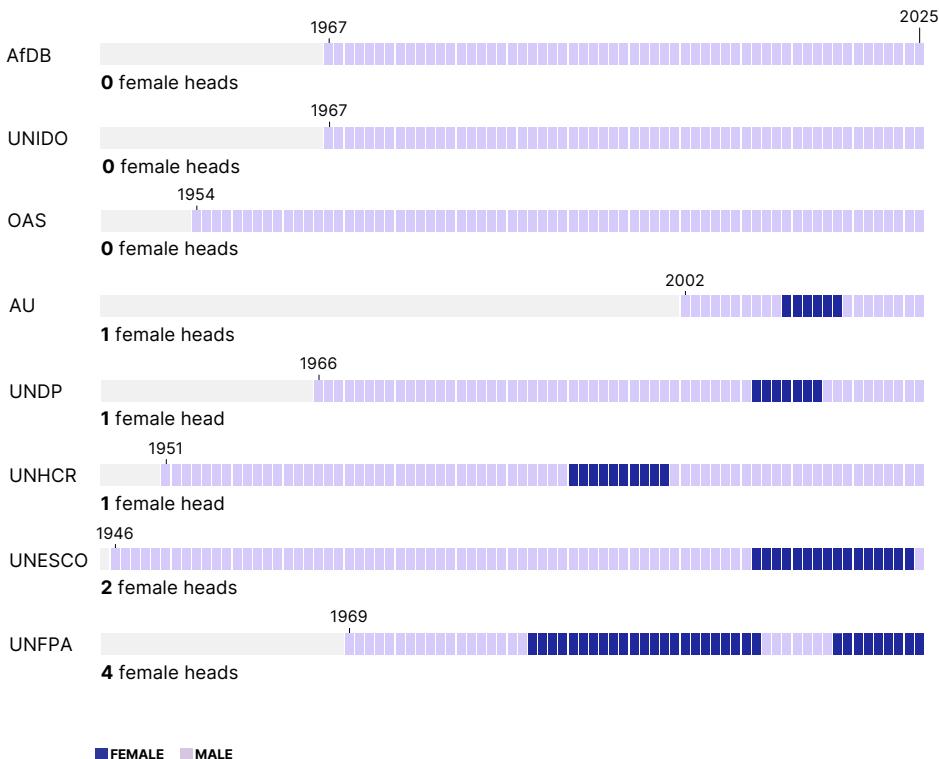
█ OFFICIAL DATA NOT FOUND ● GWL VOICES MEMBER



Notable elections in 2025: Progress without breakthroughs

The 2025 election cycle offered a revealing snapshot of how gender parity is, or isn't, advancing at the helm of multilateral institutions. Among the eight organizations tracked by GWL Voices that appointed new heads or held elections during this period, **none achieved a first-time appointment of a woman to their top post.**

HEADS AT ORGANIZATIONS WHERE NEW LEADERS WERE ELECTED OR APPOINTED IN 2025



At the **African Development Bank** (AfDB), Sidi Ould Tah was elected president, extending the institution's unbroken line of male leadership since its founding six decades ago. At the **African Union** (AU), Mahmoud Ali Youssouf of Djibouti was elected Chairperson of the Commission, continuing a pattern of male leadership in one of the continent's most influential institutions. The **Organization of American States** (OAS) likewise elected another male Secretary-General, remaining one of the oldest regional bodies never led by a woman. At the **United Nations Industrial Development Organization** (UNIDO), Gerd Müller was reappointed for a second term, continuing the same pattern.

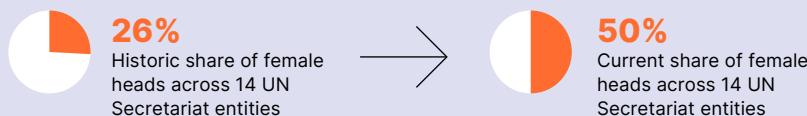
Beyond these cases, other organizations also underwent leadership changes in 2025, many of which occurred in institutions with a history of female leadership. At the **United Nations Development Programme** (UNDP), Alexander De Croo of Belgium was appointed Administrator in November 2025. At **UNESCO**, Khaled El-Enany of Egypt was elected Director-General that same month. Along similar lines, at the **UN High Commissioner for Refugees** (UNHCR), Barham Salih was appointed as High Commissioner. All three institutions have been led by women in the past, including Helen Clark and Irina Bokova, two of our co-founders. At the **United Nations Population Fund** (UNFPA), Diene Keita's appointment as Executive Director continues a pattern of women serving in the organization's top leadership role.

In 2025, member states elected Annalena Baerbock of Germany as President of the **United Nations General Assembly** for its 80th session, making her the fifth woman ever to serve in this role and the first from Western Europe.

These elections, together with the forthcoming selection of the UN Secretary-General, are unfolding in a global context marked by setbacks for gender equality and multilateral cooperation alike. At a moment when institutions are struggling to adapt to a changing world order, they serve as a reminder of what women's leadership could bring: renewed legitimacy, empathy, and imagination in the face of overlapping crises.

Deep Dive: A Closer Look Inside the UN Secretariat

GWL Voices examined women's representation across 14 key entities of the United Nations Secretariat, which is the operational and political core of the UN system (see detailed list on page 30-32). Together, these offices shape how the organization responds to conflict, humanitarian crises, and global advocacy. Looking at them collectively reveals how sustained attention to parity within the Secretariat has shifted the balance of leadership.



Across their history, 26% of all past heads of these entities have been women. Today, that share has risen dramatically: 50% of these offices are currently led by women. **Of the 14 entities analyzed, seven have been led by a woman more than once, four have had a woman at the helm once, and only three have never been headed by a woman** (Department of Operational Support, Department of Peace Operations, and the Development Coordination Office). This marks one of the strongest parity achievements anywhere in the multilateral system, reflecting the impact of deliberate institutional efforts to promote gender balance.

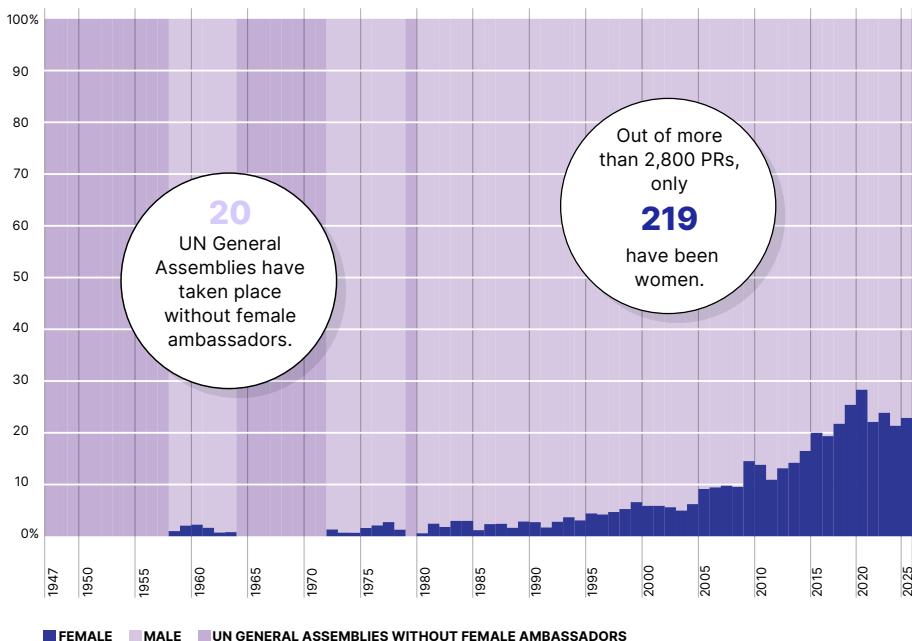
The progress extends beyond the top posts: women now make up 48% of the senior management teams across these offices. Taken together, these figures tell a compelling story: when gender parity is treated as a leadership priority, it delivers tangible results.

Tracking change among UN Permanent Representatives

The analysis of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations, first introduced in *Women in Multilateralism 2025*, continues to offer a stark measure of how slowly gender equality advances in diplomacy's most visible arena. This review focuses on the Permanent Representatives accredited to the UN headquarters in New York (the highest diplomatic post within the UN system), while this year's edition also adds a deep dive of ambassadors in Geneva and Vienna.³

FEMALE AND MALE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES TO THE UNITED NATIONS BY YEAR SINCE 1947

Last updated on 19/09/2025



3 The UN Office in Nairobi is not included because we could not identify an official source with the relevant data.

The updated data for 2025 show only limited change in the overall picture: women remain roughly one-fifth of all ambassadors accredited to the UN, and dozens of countries have never sent a woman to represent them in New York.

72

countries have **never**
sent a female PR

63

countries that have
done so **only once**

58

countries have done
so **multiple times**

Uruguay appointed a woman, Laura Dupuy, to the post for the first time, joining the small but growing group of member states to do so. But overall, the pattern persists, and is a reminder that while the principle of parity is now widely endorsed, countries still rarely practice it in the most visible diplomatic positions in the international system.

Deep Dive: A Look at UN Permanent Representatives in Geneva and Vienna

Beyond New York, at least two other major UN hubs play central roles in global governance: the UN Office at Geneva, which hosts a wide range of agencies focused on human rights, health, trade and humanitarian affairs, and the UN Office at Vienna, which is home to institutions dedicated to issues such as nuclear safety, industrial development, drugs and crime, and outer space. These offices bring together large diplomatic communities and oversee negotiations that shape key areas of international policy.

The share of women serving as Permanent Representatives in Geneva stands at 34%⁴ and in Vienna at 31%⁵, both slightly higher than the 23% recorded in New York, yet still far from equal representation.



34%
Share of female
Permanent
Representatives
in **Geneva**



31%
Share of female
Permanent
Representatives
in **Vienna**



23%
Share of female
Permanent
Representatives
in **New York**

Both offices show strong levels of gender representation in their senior management teams. **At the UN Office at Vienna, women hold 75% of senior positions, while at the UN Office at Geneva the share stands at 46%, close to parity.** Although the figures differ, both offices demonstrate that women are well represented in high-level administrative leadership.

Inside the institutions: Slow but steady progress toward parity

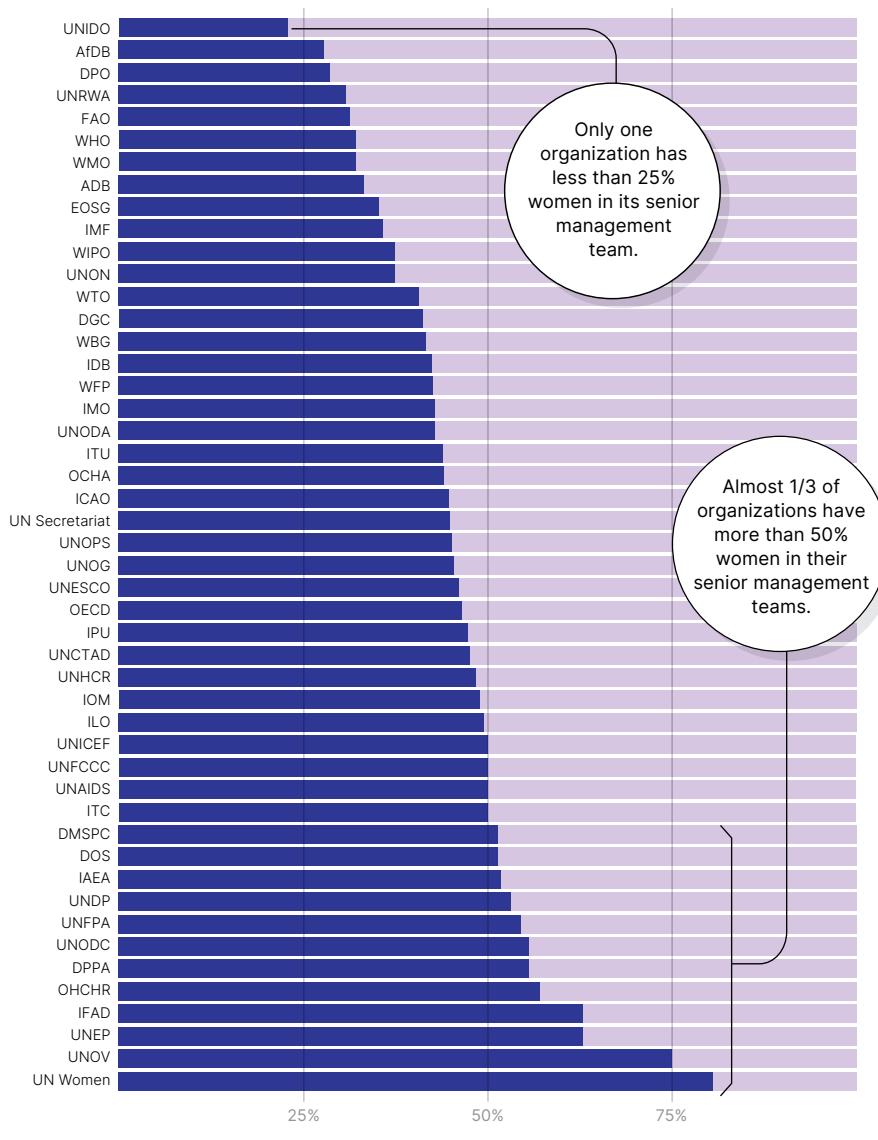
Progress toward gender balance in the senior management teams of multilateral organizations continues, albeit minimally. Currently, women hold an average of 46% of senior management positions across the 48 organizations analyzed under this indicator.

4 Data extracted on 12/11/2025 from <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/blue-book>

5 Data extracted on 19/11/2025 from <https://www.unvienna.org/protocol/en/blue-book.html>

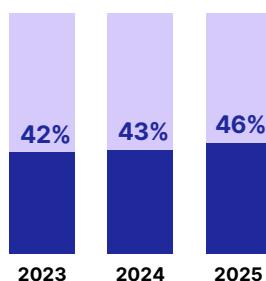
GENDER COMPOSITION OF 48 SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAMS

Last updated on November, 2025

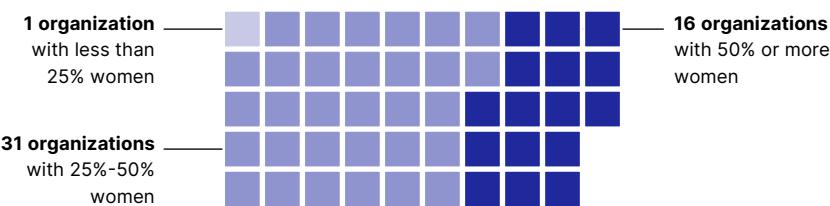


Because the number of organizations in the dataset has expanded over time, this figure is not directly comparable to past overall averages. To assess real change, we also looked at a core group of institutions that have been tracked consistently since 2023. Within this group, women's representation has shifted from 42% in 2023 to 46% in 2025.

Average share of women in senior management teams across core organizations tracked since 2023



Out of the 48 organizations analyzed, 16 have more than 50% women in their senior management teams, 31 have between 25-50%, and only one has less than 25% women.



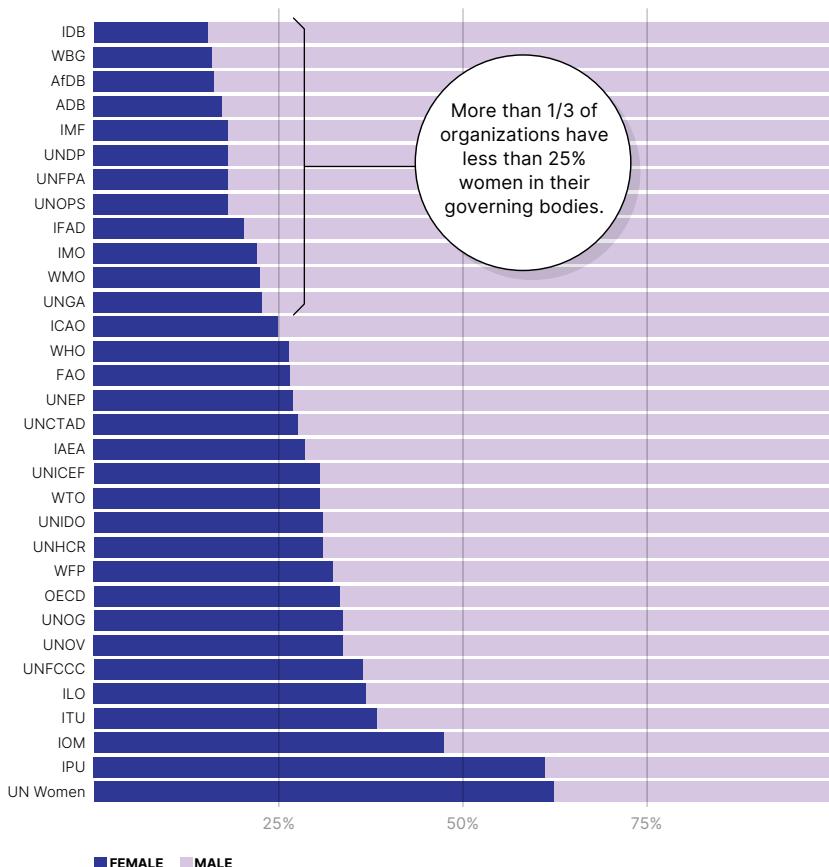
This relative stability suggests that earlier gains are being consolidated. Some organizations now report full or near parity, while others have yet to close the gap. Overall, multilateral institutions continue to outperform other sectors in gender representation at upper management levels, showing that parity, once prioritized and measured, can become an achievable standard.

Where key decisions are made, parity still lags

The governing bodies of multilateral institutions, where member states set priorities and exercise oversight, remain the most resistant to change. Today, women account for an average of 29% of members across the 32 governing bodies analyzed under this indicator. As noted earlier, the scope of organizations

GENDER COMPOSITION OF 32 GOVERNING BODIES

Last updated on November, 2025.

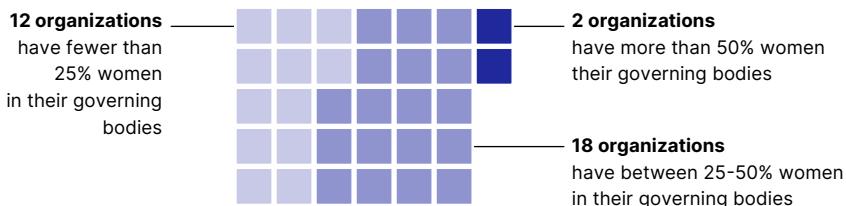
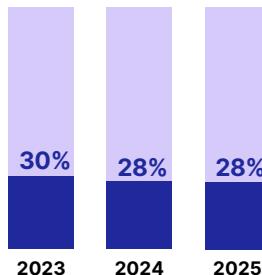


analyzed has broadened over time, meaning this year's average cannot be compared directly with past editions.

Within the core group of institutions tracked since 2023, women's representation stood at 30% in 2023 and 28% in 2025, showing little variation at best but confirming the persistence of a gender imbalance that has yet to shift meaningfully.

Out of the 32 organizations analyzed, 12 have less than 25% women, 18 fall between 25% and 50%, and only two have surpassed parity. This pattern underscores how, even as many multilateral institutions advance internally on gender equality, **member states continue to nominate men overwhelmingly to represent them in decision-making forums.**

Average share of women in governing bodies across core organizations tracked since 2023



Until governments extend their commitment to parity to all levels of representation, the governance structures of the multilateral system will continue to fall short of the inclusiveness they champion.

How did we do this

The information in this report is based on publicly available sources as well as data provided by the organizations.

Analysis of candidates for United Nations Secretary General

To compile historic data on all individuals who have been candidates for Secretary-General, we used the official UN webpages dedicated to each selection process, such as the page on the appointment of Trygve Lie⁶, as well as equivalent pages for every subsequent election. Although these official webpages identify the candidates formally considered in each election, they may not include every woman who was discussed informally or signaled as a potential candidate at the time.

Historical analysis of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations

The historical dataset on Permanent Representatives to the United Nations was first compiled for [Women in Multilateralism 2025](#), using the records made publicly available through the United Nations Digital Library. For years in which no relevant archives were available, such as 2017 and 2022, we relied on the “Credentials Presented to the Secretary-General” as proxies. For this year’s edition, we did not reconstruct the dataset; instead, we updated it by incorporating the most recent presentations of credentials to the United Nations. We include the description of last year’s data collection method here to ensure that the full methodological basis remains transparent to readers.

⁶ <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/selection-and-appointment-of-trygve-halvdan-lie>

Data collection

We first downloaded more than 1,300 documents of the Permanent Missions to the United Nations from 1946 to 2024. The number of documents per year varied, since the documents reflected changes in Permanent Missions to the UN. For some years there was only one document, for others there were as many as 50.

We did not consider interim or deputy Permanent Representatives. While we made efforts to check the data manually to reduce our margin of error, we welcome any corrections, as we collaboratively bring more accountability to the international system.

Data processing and analysis

We developed an automated script to extrapolate data from the documents. In cases in which the documents were not machine readable, the data was extracted manually. All data collected was checked manually to address potential errors in the automated process.

The gender of all Permanent Representatives was determined by crossreferencing the database with Harvard's World Gender Name Dictionary, which maps names to their gender across different countries. Data was then analyzed using the individual and the Member States as the main units of analysis.

Collection and analysis for ongoing indicators

In addition to the data mentioned above, the report tracks gender parity at three levels: heads of organizations, senior management teams, and governing bodies. Data for this report was gathered between July and November of 2025.

The data about the heads of multilaterals since 1945 was obtained from open sources (primarily institutional websites). The titles for organizations' heads vary widely, from presidents and director-generals to high commissioners and executive directors, among others. In all cases, we selected the highest level figure leading each organization. Some of these heads are elected by governing bodies, others are appointed, as is the case in numerous UN entities in which heads are appointed by the Secretary-General. This report does not include organization heads who are acting in an interim capacity.

Senior management teams were defined as the top four staff levels within each organization, excluding the head. In the UN, these grades are USG, ASG, D2 and D1. Since other organizations use a variety of naming conventions, participants were asked to provide data based on their own definition of the top four levels. For UN entities, we used the [UN System-wide Dashboard on Gender Parity](#) or the [UN Secretariat Gender Parity Dashboard](#). For organizations outside the UN System, we requested the information via email using a standardized data collection template.

In terms of governing bodies, we asked organizations to provide data on the gender composition of those bodies through which member states exercise oversight organization and/or who elect the organization's head. In some cases, we used the gender of the Permanent Representatives to a given governing body, but in others, organizations provided data reflecting the gender of the heads of delegation of the most recent meeting of their governing bodies. In any case, the gender composition of governing bodies reflects decisions by member states and not decisions or policies of each organization.

The validity dates for all the information obtained are specified by organization in the table on pages 30-32.

Comparisons should be made with care. Organizations differ in the size and structure of their governing bodies and senior management teams, which limits

direct comparability. Since the sample has expanded each year, only the core group tracked since 2023 allows reliable year-to-year comparisons. Given the small sample sizes for some indicators, minor annual changes may not reflect broader trends.

Since individual appointments to governing bodies and senior management teams change continually, the information in this report should only be seen as a “snapshot” that highlights broad trends taking place over multiple years. We welcome updates and corrections to our data and endeavor to input these in our databases immediately. Our goal is to provide the clearest possible picture of the role of women in these organizations.

We will continue to publish data from *Women in Multilateralism 2025* for organizations that did not provide data this year, but did provide data the year prior. We hope to be able to include their updated information in future editions of this report. Our report includes data on the heads of 62 organizations, whereas the data for senior management teams and governing bodies involves a smaller sample.

Selection criteria

Organizations were selected using a combination of quantitative and qualitative criteria. The final selection includes organizations with budgets of at least \$10 million in development assistance per the OECD Development Assistance Committee, and organizations that have a strategic role in key issues of international development and multilateral cooperation. The selection includes UN specialized agencies, funds and programs, departments and offices, as well as other UN entities. It also includes international financial institutions and other key multilateral organizations. While the report includes numerous organizations, our selection is not comprehensive.

Organizations in this report

Organization	Acronym	Head - position	Head - Data validity date	Governing body - Name	Governing body - Data validity date	Senior Management Team - Data validity date	Core Organizations*
UN SYSTEM							
Food and Agriculture Organization	FAO	Director-General	26/09/2025	Conference	14/10/2025	30/09/2025	no
International Atomic Energy Agency	IAEA	Director General	26/09/2025	Board of Governors	04/08/2025	09/12/2025	yes
International Civil Aviation Organization	ICAO	Secretary-General	26/09/2025	The ICAO Council	08/01/2025	30/09/2025	yes
International Fund for Agricultural Development	IFAD	President	26/09/2025	Governing Council	09/02/2025	09/09/2025	yes
International Labor Organization	ILO	Director General	26/09/2025	Governing Body of the International Labour Office	29/08/2025	29/08/2025	yes
International Maritime Organization	IMO	Secretary-General	6/11/2023	IMO Assembly	08/01/2024	30/09/2025	yes
International Monetary Fund	IMF	Managing Director	26/09/2025	Board of Directors	31/08/2025	31/08/2025	yes
International Organization for Migration	IOM	Director General	26/09/2025	IOM Council	7/08/2025	09/12/2025	no
International Telecommunications Union	ITU	Secretary-General	26/09/2025	ITU Council	08/08/2025	30/09/2025	yes
International Trade Centre	ITC	Executive Director	26/09/2025	Joint Advisory Group		30/09/2025	yes
Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS	UNAIDS	Executive Director	26/09/2025	Not included	N/A	30/09/2025	no
UN Children's Fund	UNICEF	Executive Director	26/09/2025	Executive Board	16/10/2023	30/09/2025	yes
UN Conference on Trade and Development	UNCTAD	Secretary-General	26/09/2025	Trade and Development Board	08/01/2025	30/09/2025	yes
UN Development Programme	UNDP	Administrator	5/12/2025	Executive Board	14/10/2025	30/09/2025	yes
UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	UNESCO	Director-General	4/12/25	Not included	N/A	30/09/2025	yes
UN Environment Programme	UNEP	Executive Director	26/09/2025	UN Environment Assembly	11/07/2025	30/09/2025	yes
UN Framework Convention on Climate Change	UNFCCC	Executive Secretary	26/09/2025	Bureau of the COP, CMP and CMA	18/11/2025	10/11/2025	yes
UN General Assembly	UNGA	President	19/09/2025	General Assembly	21/09/2025	Does not apply	yes

Organization	Acronym	Head - position	Head - Data validity date	Governing body - Name	Governing body - Data validity date	Senior Management Team - Data validity date	Core Organizations*
UN High Commissioner for Refugees	UNHCR	High Commissioner	26/09/2025	Executive Committee (ExCom)	12/11/2025	30/09/2025	yes
UN Industrial Development Organization	UNIDO	Director General	26/09/2025	UNIDO General Conference	12/11/2025	30/09/2025	no
UN Office for Project Services	UNOPS	Executive Director	26/09/2025	Executive Board	14/10/2025	30/09/2025	yes
UN Population Fund	UNFPA	Executive Director	26/09/2025	Executive Board	14/10/2025	30/09/2025	yes
UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East	UNRWA	Director	26/09/2025	Not included	N/A	30/09/2025	no
UN Women	UN Women	Executive Director	26/09/2025	UN Women Executive Board	18/11/2025	30/09/2025	yes
UN-Habitat	UN-Habitat	Executive Director	26/09/2025	Not included	N/A	Not included	no
World Bank Group	WBG	President	26/09/2025	Board of Directors	03/06/2024	24/10/2025	yes
World Food Programme	WFP	Executive Director	26/09/2025	WFP Executive Board	06/30/2025	30/09/2025	yes
World Health Organization	WHO	Director-General	26/09/2025	Executive Board	08/13/2025	30/09/2025	yes
World Intellectual Property Organization	WIPO	Director General	26/09/2025			30/09/2025	yes
World Meteorological Organization	WMO	Secretary-General	26/09/2025	WMO Congress	30/06/2023	30/09/2025	yes
World Trade Organization	WTO	Director-General	26/09/2025	WTO General Council	01/11/2025	01/11/2025	yes
UN SECRETARIAT							
Department of Global Communications	DGC	Assistant Secretary-General	25/10/2025	Does not apply	N/A	4/12/2025	no
Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance	DMSPC	Under Secretary-General	07/10/2025	Does not apply	N/A	4/12/2025	no
Department of Operational Support	DOS	Under Secretary-General	07/10/2025	Does not apply	N/A	4/12/2025	no
Executive Office of the Secretary-General	EOSG	Chef de Cabinet	10/11/2025	Does not apply	N/A	4/12/2025	no
Office of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights	OHCHR	High Commissioner	26/09/2025	Does not apply		30/09/2025	yes
UN Department of Peace Operations	DPO	Under Secretary-General	26/09/2025	Does not apply	N/A	4/12/2025	no
UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs	DPPA	Under Secretary-General	26/09/2025	Does not apply	N/A	30/09/2025	no
UN Development Coordination Office	DCO	Assistant Secretary-General	26/09/2025	Does not apply	N/A	N/A	no

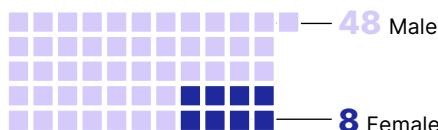
Organization	Acronym	Head - position	Head - Data validity date	Governing body - Name	Governing body - Data validity date	Senior Management Team - Data validity date	Core Organizations*
UN Office at Geneva	UNOG	Director-General	26/09/2025	Permanent Representatives	12/11/2025	30/09/2025	yes
UN Office at Nairobi	UNON	Director-General	26/09/2025	Data not available	N/A	30/09/2025	yes
UN Office at Vienna	UNOV	Director-General	18/11/2025	Permanent Representatives	19/11/2025	18/11/2025	no
UN Office for Disarmament Affairs	UNODA	High Representative	26/09/2025	Does not apply	N/A	30/09/2025	yes
UN Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	OCHA	Under Secretary-General	26/09/2025	Does not apply	N/A	30/09/2025	no
UN Office on Drugs and Crime	UNODC	Director-General	26/09/2025	Does not apply	N/A	30/09/2025	yes
UN Secretariat	UN Secretariat	Secretary-General	26/09/2025	Does not apply	N/A	30/09/2025	yes
OTHER							
African Development Bank	AfDB	President	26/09/2025	Board of Governors	7/11/2025	31/10/2025	yes
African Union	AU	Chairperson	14/11/2025	Not included	N/A	Not included	no
Asian Development Bank	ADB	President	26/09/2025	Board of Governors	7/11/2025	2023	yes
Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank	AIIB	President	26/09/2025	Not included	N/A	Not included	no
Caribbean Development Bank	CDB	President	26/09/2025	Not included	N/A	Not included	no
Central American Bank for Economic Integration	CABEI	Executive President	26/09/2025	Not included	N/A	Not included	no
Development Bank of Latin America	CAF	President	26/09/2025	Not included	N/A	Not included	no
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development	EBRD	President	26/09/2025	Not included	N/A	Not included	no
European Investment Bank	EIB	President	26/09/2025	Not included	N/A	Not included	no
European Union	EU	President	14/11/2025	Not included	N/A	Not included	no
Inter-American Development Bank	IDB	President	26/09/2025	Board of Executive Directors	19/12/2024	19/12/2024	yes
Inter-Parliamentary Union	IPU	President	26/09/2025	Not included	N/A	Not included	no
International Energy Agency	IEA	Executive Director	26/09/2025	Not included	N/A	N/A	no
Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development	OECD	Secretary-General	26/09/2025	Council	23/10/2025	23/10/2025	yes
Organization of American States	OAS	Secretary-General	14/11/2025	Not included	N/A	Not included	no
West African Development Bank	WADB	President	26/09/2025	Not included	N/A	Not included	no

* Core organizations refers to a group of 35 organizations for which we have tracked the gender composition of senior management teams and governing bodies since 2023.

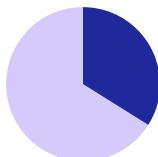
2025 in a Snapshot

► UN Secretary-Generals

Candidates since 1945



► Permanent Representatives to the United Nations



72

countries have **never** sent a female PR

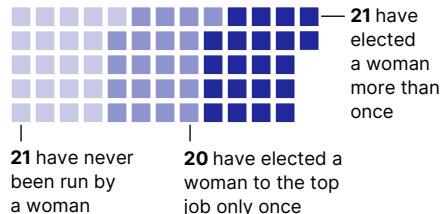
63

countries that have done so **only once**

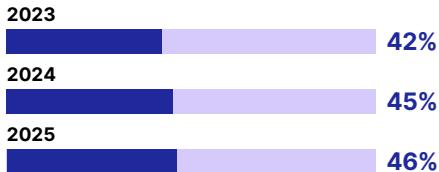
58

countries have done so **multiple times**

► Heads in 2025

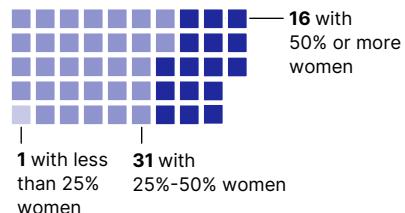


Percentage of organizations headed by women

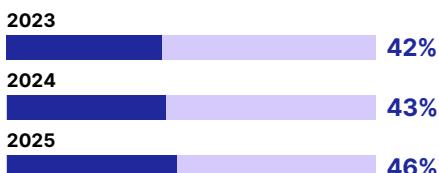


► Senior management teams

In 2025

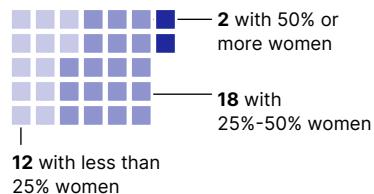


Average share of women in senior management teams

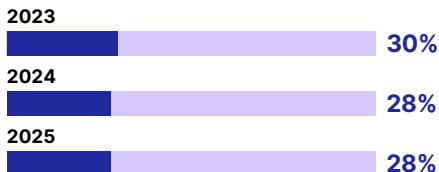


► Governing bodies

In 2025



Average share of women in governing bodies



Note: Cross-year comparisons for senior management teams and governing bodies only apply to a limited set of organizations that we have tracked since 2023.

About GWL Voices

GWL Voices is an organization of women leaders from all regions and backgrounds committed to building a gender-equal international system that effectively responds to today's challenges of sustainable development, peace, security, and human rights.



LEADING CHANGE,
DRIVING LEADERSHIP

<https://www.gwlvoices.org/>