

Mapping Women in Climate and Environmental Leadership



Women play key roles in climate action and environmental stewardship, yet remain underrepresented in the global institutions where climate and environment decisions are made. GWL Voices' Spotlight report visualises women's representation across three major multilateral conventions - the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) - as well as four other key institutions: the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), Green Climate Fund (GCF), Global Environment Facility (GEF), and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Women lead gender agendas, but are underrepresented in broader national coordination.

They hold nearly all gender focal point roles, which drive gender integration in policies, but only a third of national focal point seats, which coordinate countries' overall engagement in the conventions.

WOMEN AS GENDER FOCAL POINTS AND NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS (%)



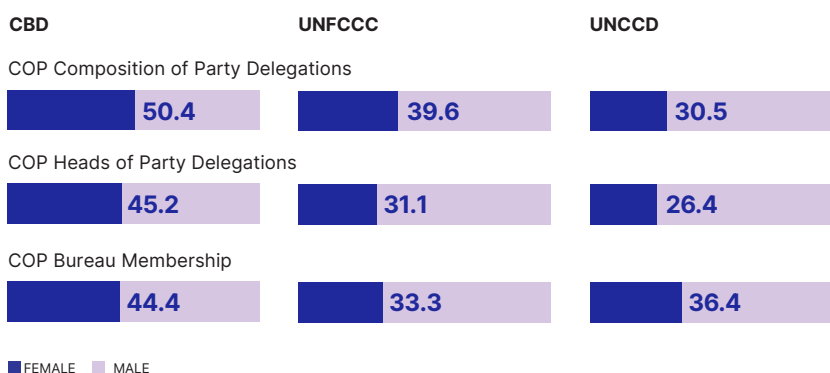
*Includes only CBD and UNFCCC.

At the most recent COPs, the CBD COP stands out for near gender parity,

with women representing roughly half of participants across selected roles. The other conventions lag behind.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AS HEADS OF PARTY DELEGATION, PARTY DELEGATIONS, AND BUREAU MEMBERSHIP BY CONVENTION (%)

CBD (COP 16), UNCCD (COP 16), and UNFCCC (COP 30).

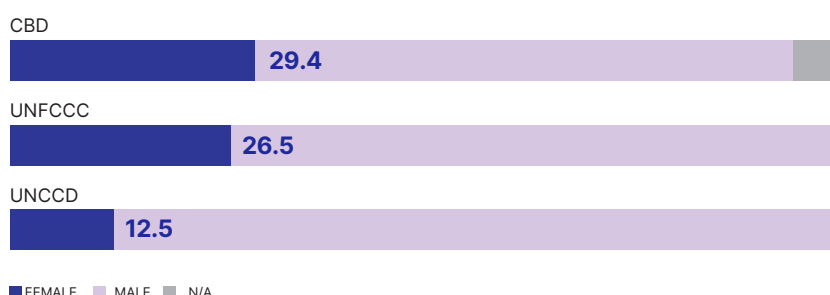


Among COP Presidencies, representation narrows further.

No convention nears parity: CBD leads again, UNCCD lags behind.

WOMEN IN COP HISTORICAL PRESIDENCY (%)

COP 1 to 16 (CBD), COP 1 to 16 (UNCCD), COP 1 to 30 (UNFCCC).

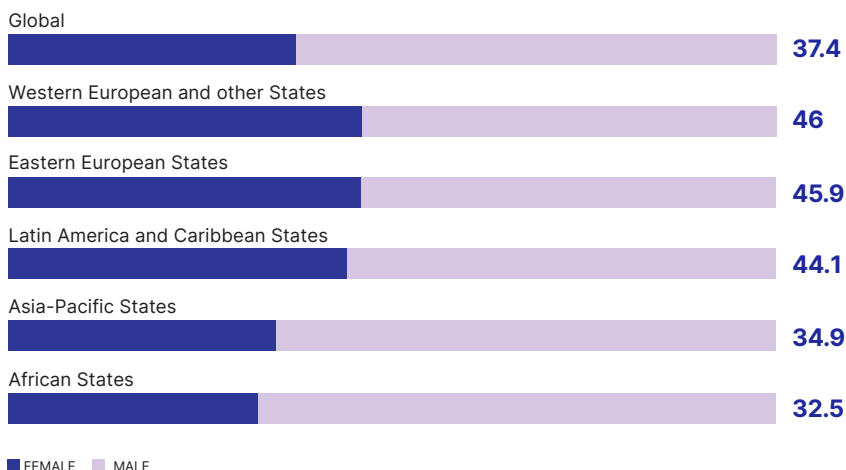


Across regions, representation also varies.

Women's leadership is strongest in Western and Eastern Europe, but lowest in Africa and Asia-Pacific, highlighting both gender and geographic imbalances in climate decision-making.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN COPS BY REGION OF ORIGIN (%)

As Party Delegates, Bureau Members and COP Presidencies at CBD (COP 16), UNCCD (COP 16) and UNFCCC (COP 30).

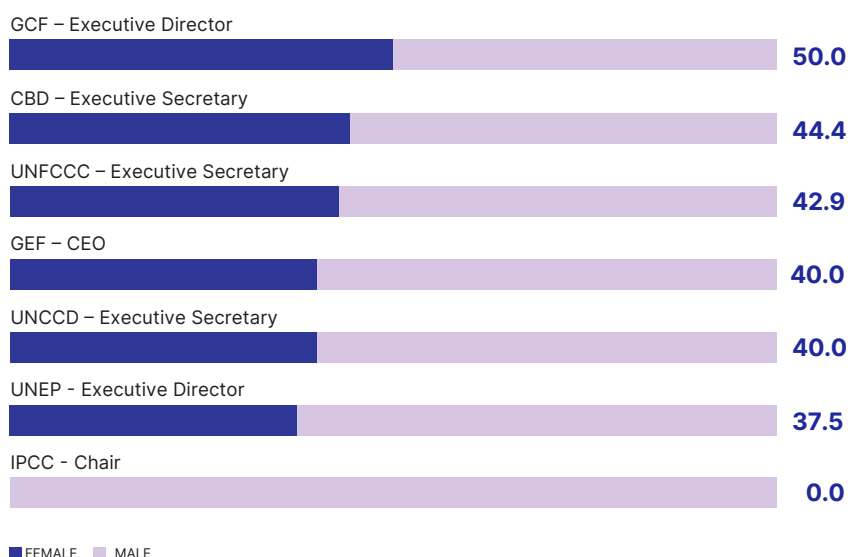


Beyond the COPs, progress remains uneven.

Among the heads of global environmental conventions and organizations, gender balance varies widely. The GCF approaches parity, while the IPCC has never had a woman chair. Across the seven institutions analyzed, women have held leadership positions in 30.3% of all observed years.

FEMALE HEADS OF KEY ORGANIZATIONS SINCE THEIR FOUNDING (%)

From 1972 to 2025 in CBD, GCF, GEF, IPCC, UNCCD, UNEP and UNFCCC.



OVERALL INSIGHTS

Women are better represented in gender-related roles (gender focal points) but remain underrepresented in broader roles (national focal points).

In high-level positions (such as in COP Bureaus, Heads of Party Delegations, COP Presidencies, and Heads of Organizations), **representation remains low**.

Representation also varies across conventions: **the CBD shows stronger female participation in both delegations and leadership**, compared to the UNFCCC and UNCCD.

Regionally, **women's representation is higher** in Western European and other States and Eastern European states, **but remains low** in Asia Pacific and Africa, reinforcing both gender and geographic inequalities in global climate governance.



These findings are part of a full report. Access it here for more data, first-hand testimonies of women climate leaders, and a review of gender equality policies across the seven institutions.

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