

A horizontal bar chart with a white bar on the left and a light orange bar on the right. The white bar represents 13% of the total length. The text '13%' is written in white inside the white bar.

13%

Women in Multilateralism 2024

Behind Closed Doors

An analysis of the gender composition of governing bodies and management teams in the world's leading multilateral organizations

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Introduction

In 2023, GWL Voices drew global attention to the scarcity of women at the top of international organizations. Our report mapped the gender of the leaders of 33 of these organizations since 1945 and found that women have been in charge for only 12% of the time.

Of course, that was a very partial snapshot of the role of women in these institutions. The heads of international organizations do not exercise authority in the manner of a chief executive in a private corporation. Rather, power in international organizations resides almost entirely in the governing bodies where each country appoints a formal representative. These bodies, depending on their mandate, often elect the leader of each organization, they approve budgets and define operational strategies which are then carried out by professional managers and staff.

The deliberations of these governing bodies and senior management teams take place largely behind closed doors. Yet it is in these spaces where decisions that affect millions of people worldwide are made

Consequently, our 2024 report, in addition to including an expanded list of 54 organizations, features two new sections on the gender composition of governing bodies and senior management teams. This information, which has never before been aggregated and displayed, tells two starkly contrasting stories.

The first one fills us with hope and appreciation for leaders and institutions who are proving that gender parity can be quickly achieved—even in large and politically complex bureaucracies. See page 6 to learn which organizations are leading the way with their senior management teams.

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The second story, unfortunately, is one of double standards and the continued exclusion of women. Some 189 countries have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW. But as can be seen

on page 8, when it comes to selecting their representatives for the governing bodies of international organizations, a majority of countries continue to exclude qualified women.

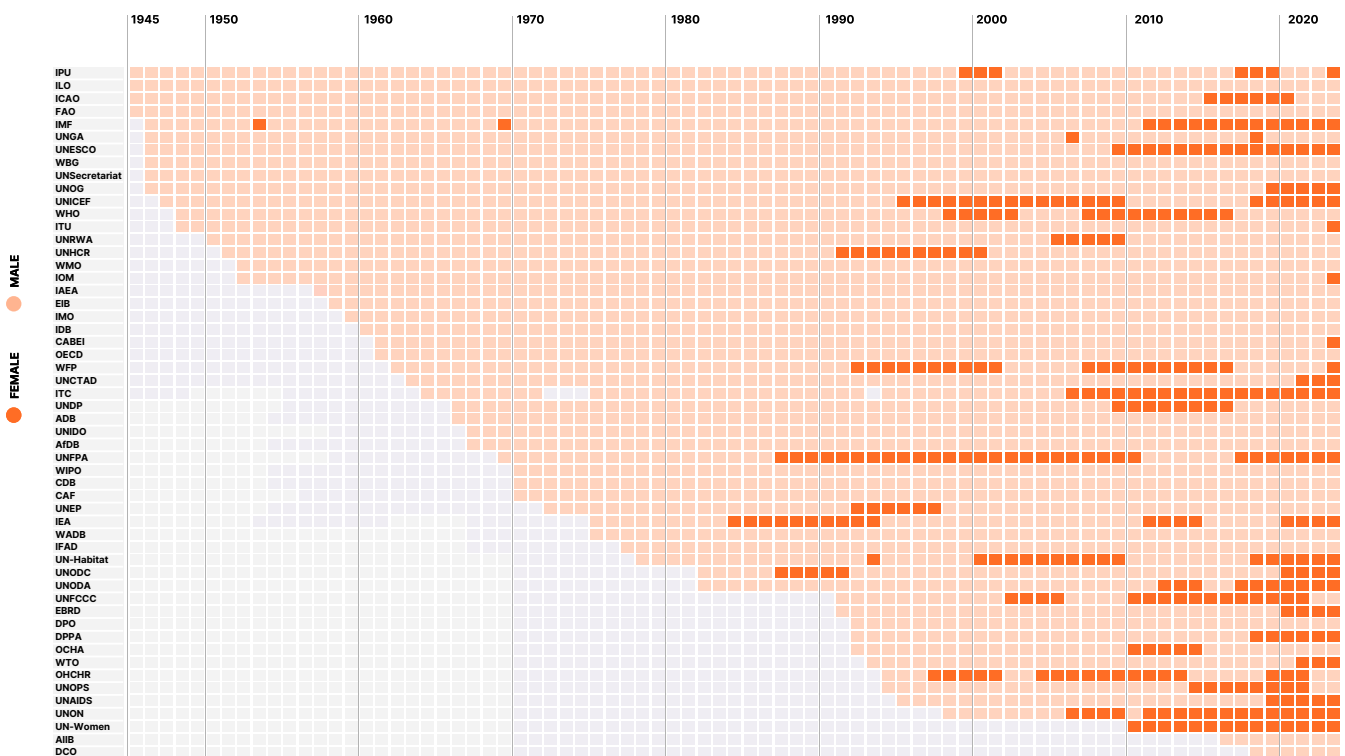
The members of GWL Voices believe it is long past time for this tradition to end. In partnerships with several governments and with the support of hundreds of like-minded partners, we have launched the **Rotation for Equality Campaign**. See our spotlight feature on page 10 to learn how this simple reform could bring gender parity to the presidency of the UN General Assembly starting in 2025.

Change at the top: Elections in 2022-2023

Each year, GWL Voices tracks the gender of the heads of the world’s most important multilateral organizations. We display this data starting in 1945 to highlight the entrenched patterns of gender exclusion that have come to characterize many organizations. Indeed, this graph shows that 21 of these organizations have never elected a woman to the top job, and 15 have done so only once since 1945.

Only 13% of all elected leaders have been women since 1945

Gender of multilateral organization leaders by year



DATA LAST UPDATED ON 07/12/23.

IF A LEADER WAS ELECTED IN 2023, BUT THE TERM WAS SET TO BEGIN IN 2024, HE OR SHE WILL NOT BE REFLECTED IN THIS DATA.

Progress has been slow. In fact, the average share of female heads in the last five decades of the past century was 4%.

But after decades of inertia, the shift toward gender parity is gaining momentum. From the 2000s to the 2010s, the average percentage of elected women leaders in these organizations jumped from 17% to 31% (see page 15 for more information).

Just during the last two years, eight women have been named to the top job out of a total of 23 organizations electing new leaders. And seven of these women were elected or appointed in 2023.

Four of these organizations made history by electing a woman to the top job for the first time. After 157 years of uninterrupted male leadership, the **International Telecommunications Union** elected Doreen Bogdan-Martin to the post of Secretary-General. Amy Pope became the first female Director General of the **International Organization for Migration** in its 71-year history. Celeste Saulo enabled the **World Meteorological Organization** to end a 73-year streak of male-only Secretary-Generals, Nadia Calviño was elected as the first female president of the **European Investment Bank**, and Gisela Sánchez became the first female head of the **Central American Bank for Economic Integration**.

The **World Bank**, the **Inter-American Development Bank** and **Food and Agriculture Organization**, the **International Fund for Agricultural Development** and the **International Labour Organization** also held elections during the last two years. For the moment, they remain in the dwindling group of institutions that have only been run by men.

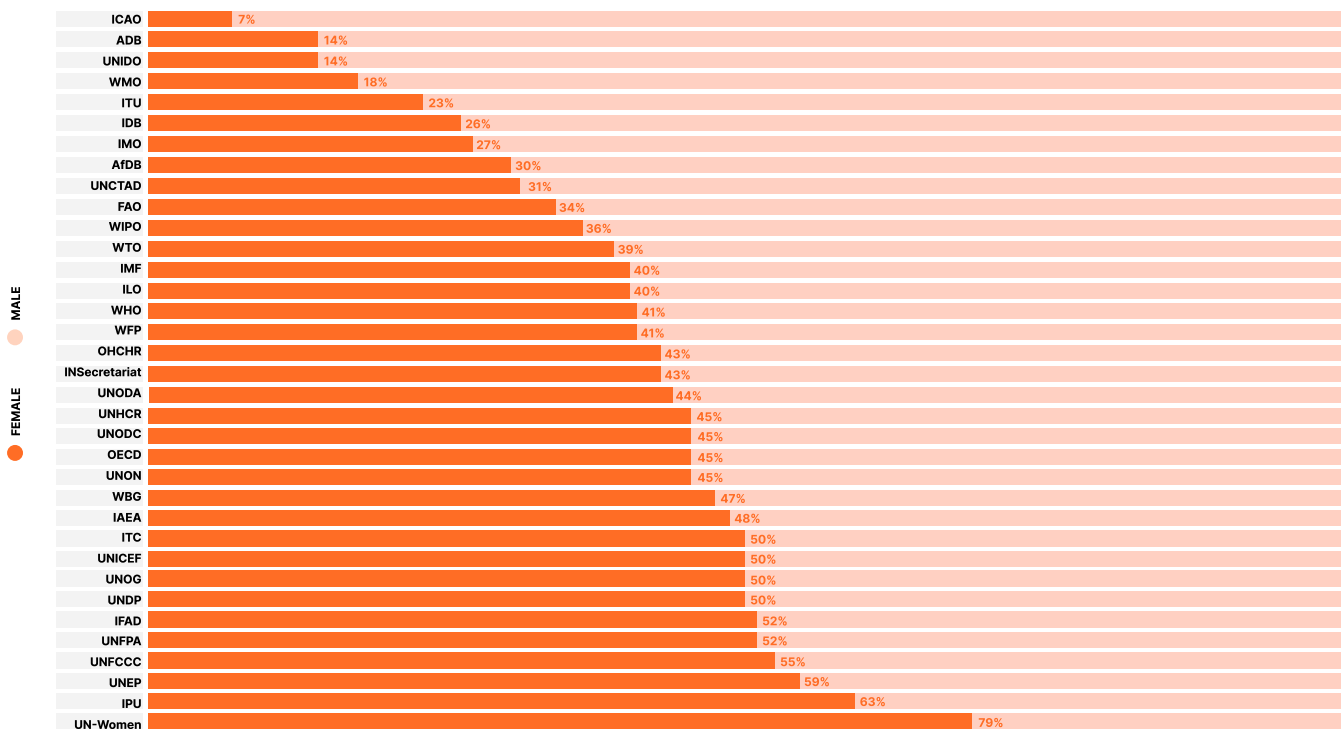
Progress has been slow [...] but after decades of inertia, the shift toward gender parity is gaining momentum.

At the vanguard of parity:

Women in senior management teams

The average share of women in senior management teams is 42%

Gender composition of 35 senior management teams



We are thrilled to report that nearly half of these organizations have reached or are close to reaching gender parity in their senior management teams. The average share of women in senior management teams is 42%, with a majority of organizations in the 25%-to-50% range.

It is particularly noteworthy that in ten organizations, the share of women in senior management is 50% or more, while in only five it is below 25%.

Just one generation ago, these percentages would have seemed like pure fantasy. And from our personal experience, we know that this is no accident.

Unlike members of governing bodies which are, in many cases, appointed by governments, the senior managers of these organizations are typically chosen through competitive selection processes. In recent years, many organizations have adopted policies to encourage gender parity in these selections. Some have even set specific targets and timelines for reaching them. And on the whole, these policies have rapidly yielded results.

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Some of the best-performing organizations are in sectors considered more “appropriate” for female leadership. But others have made explicit commitments to reverse a long legacy of gender discrimination. By adopting policies that range from “gender-blind” hiring systems to comprehensive programs for developing and promoting qualified women professionals, many organizations have made rapid progress in recent years.

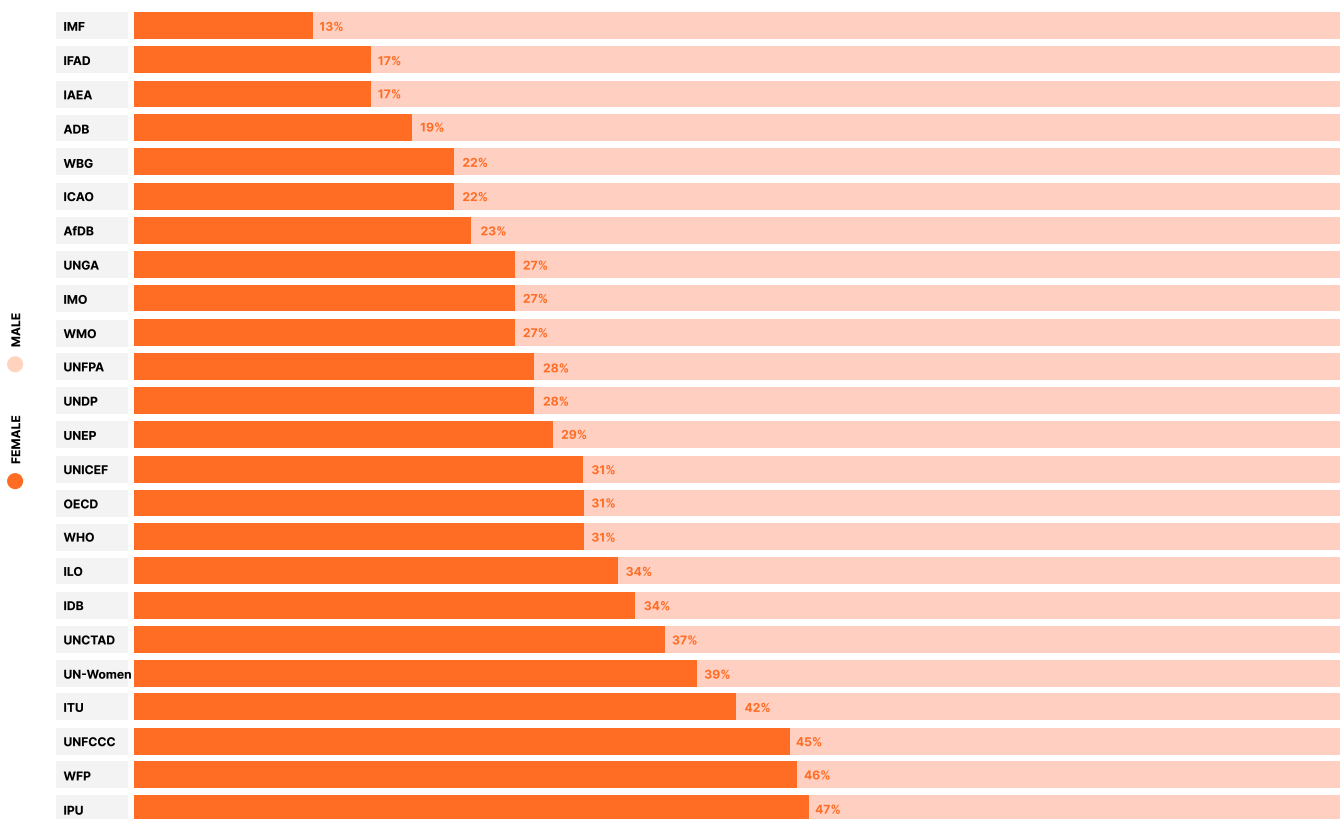
For example, the United Nations System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity—one of the signature initiatives of UN Secretary-General António Guterres—has built on earlier efforts to achieve ambitious targets and timelines that accelerated progress toward parity.

Do as I say, not as I do:

The male-dominated world of governing bodies

Women are underrepresented on the boards of every one of these organizations

Gender composition of 24 governing bodies



Despite the abundance of superbly qualified women in the international system, our research shows that governments consistently favor men when they appoint representatives to these governing bodies.

In many cases, the governing bodies of international organizations elect the heads, determine budgets, and establish critical policies. This is where countries actually exercise their power in the international system—and where they reveal their true priorities regarding gender equality.

Despite the abundance of superbly qualified women in the international system, our research shows that governments consistently favor men when they appoint representatives to these governing bodies.

As illustrated in this graph, a majority of these bodies appear to be stuck in the first half of the 20th century. Women are underrepresented in every single organization analyzed. The average proportion of women in governing bodies is 30%. And in seven organizations, women make up less than 25% of the governing body.

The UN General Assembly, perhaps the most consequential of all governing bodies, is emblematic of this problem. Women make up only 27% of all ambassadors. Each year member states elect a president who serves as chair and presiding officer of the General Assembly. Since 1946, 74 men and only four women have been elected to this position.

Last year, GWL Voices launched the Rotation for Equality Campaign that would ensure that every other year, starting in 2025, the president of the UN General Assembly will be a woman. At the General Assembly held in September of 2023, Slovenia, Botswana and Spain supported this idea.

See our Spotlight on the UN General Assembly to learn more about the rotation for equality concept, along with our thoughts about the upcoming election of the UN Secretary General in 2026.

Spotlight:

Gender parity in the UN General Assembly and the Rotation for Equality Campaign

Any assessment of the movement toward gender parity in the United Nations system immediately encounters a paradox.

No international organization has been more consequential in advancing the rights of women and girls than the United Nations. Since its creation in 1946, the UN Commission on the Status of Women has been the world's principal policy-making body dedicated to gender equality. Milestones such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) and the Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (2000) laid the legal foundations for women's rights around the world. By articulating fundamental principles in a manner endorsed by all member nations, the UN has helped to legitimize the efforts of countless individuals and organizations that fight for gender equality every day.

In recent years, the UN system has also been at the forefront of the global effort to promote gender parity in the workforce. Building on the work of his predecessors, Secretary-General António Guterres launched an ambitious gender parity strategy in 2017 that has helped to put many UN agencies at the top of our rankings. Thanks to these policies—and to the unflagging commitment of thousands of UN officials in leadership roles—the senior management teams of many organizations in the UN system have already reached full gender parity.

But this impressive legacy is overshadowed by three glaring incongruities. No woman has ever held the position of Secretary General of the UN since the organization was founded in 1945. At the UN General Assembly (which serves as its governing body), women make up only 27% of all permanent representatives. And the presidency of the General Assembly, a key position that is elected by members each year, has been held by a total of 74 men and only four women. And of the 21 vice presidencies of the General Assembly, only 14% are held by member states with women as their permanent representative.

The discordance between what the UN preaches regarding gender and what it practices at the highest management levels is extraordinarily damaging, because the United Nations is not just another international organization. No other global body replicates the comprehensive nature of the UN's work, its commitment to addressing a wide range of global issues, and its platform for member states to engage in diplomacy and cooperation on a global scale. The UN's universal membership and its status as the world's foremost international organization make it a bellwether for how other global institutions treat leadership.

Ironically, the UN General Assembly has always been keenly attuned to questions of fairness and representation in areas other than gender. To ensure that the presidency of the UNGA is not monopolized by countries from one part of the world, for example, member nations long ago agreed to an informal rule whereby this position rotates each year among five world regions (Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western Europe and Other States). This simple but effective agreement ensures that each region gets consistent and proportional access to the UNGA presidency, which plays a critical role in balancing the demands of the UN's principal decision-making bodies (including the Security Council and the Office of the Secretary General) and in determining the votes necessary to approve resolutions, among many other responsibilities.

Just as regional rotation has helped to ensure geographic and geopolitical diversity at the UNGA, gender rotation would ensure a proportional form of gender diversity.

The regional rotation concept is the inspiration for GWL Voices' Rotation for Equality Campaign, which was first proposed in a column by Susana Malcorra last year. Just as regional rotation has helped to ensure geographic and geopolitical diversity at the UNGA, alternating between a man and a woman would ensure a proportional form of gender diversity. While preserving the regional rotation tradition, this new agreement would ensure that, starting in 2025, the gender of the incoming UNGA president would change every year. [Click here](#) to learn how you can join the family of countries and organizations that are working to bring this proposal to a vote at the UN.

In a similar spirit, GWL Voices is beginning to raise global awareness about the election of the next Secretary-General of the UN, which is expected in 2026.

Conclusion

How did we do this?

Data collection

The information in this report is based on publicly available sources as well as data provided by the organizations. The data about the heads of multilaterals since 1945 was obtained from open sources (primarily institutional websites). GWL Voices systematically contacted organizations requesting data about their senior management teams and governing bodies via a standardized online data collection form. The specific validity date for the information provided by each organization is listed on page 14.

Data for this report was gathered between **April and October of 2023**. 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.

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.

Our goal is to provide the clearest possible picture of the role of women in these organizations.

A note on our data

Although we made repeated efforts to contact each organization, some did not send answers to our queries. While it is possible to determine the identities of the heads of organizations through open sources, the composition of their governing bodies and senior management teams is frequently not available from open sources. As of October 20, the International Energy Agency and UNESCO had not sent us the requested information. We hope to be able to include their information in future editions of this report.

Our report includes data on the heads of 54 organizations, whereas the data for senior management teams and governing bodies involves a smaller sample. We expect to include all 54 organizations in our senior management team and governing body database in future editions. For this report, we requested information on senior management teams and governing bodies from 38 organizations, of which 30 provided complete data, six provided partial information, and two did not provide the information requested.

The report tracks gender parity at three levels: heads of organizations, senior management teams, and governing bodies. 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 the 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.

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 most 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.

Moreover, the sizes and nature of governing bodies and senior management teams vary significantly across organizations, and this should also be taken into account when analyzing and comparing the data.

Organizations in this report

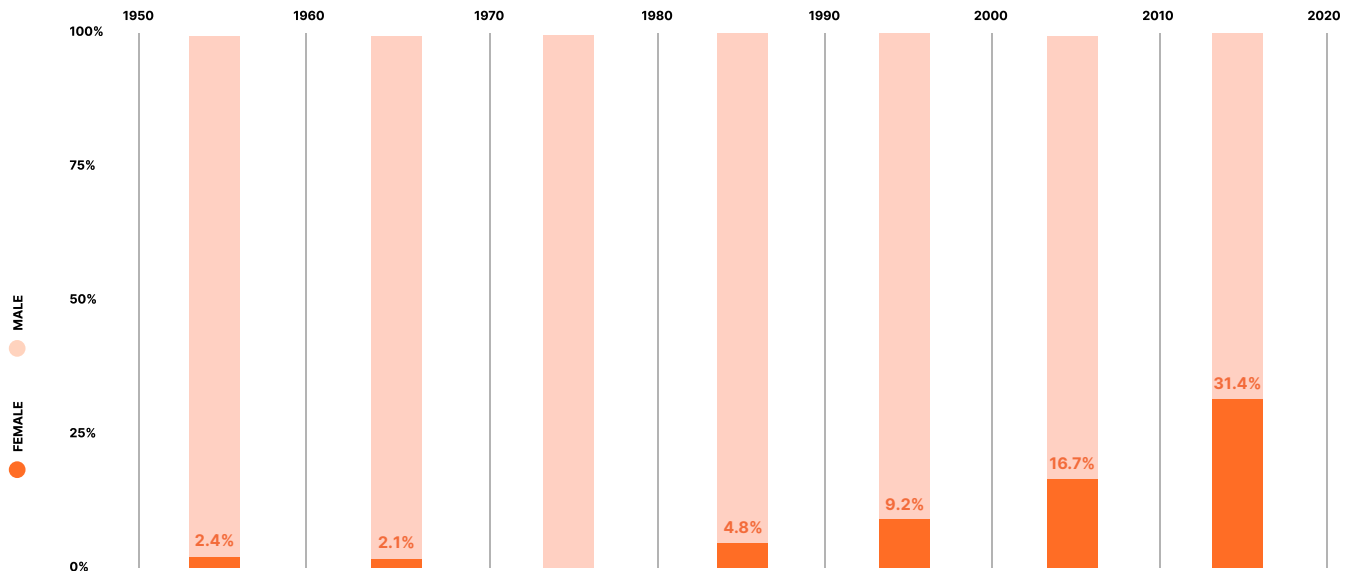
ORGANIZATION	ACRONYM	HEAD		GOVERNING BODY		SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM
		POSITION	DATA VALIDITY DATE	NAME	DATA VALIDITY DATE	DATA VALIDITY DATE
African Development Bank	AfDB	President	07/12/2023	Board of Governors	01/08/2023	01/08/2023
Asian Development Bank	ADB	President	07/12/2023	Board of Governors	15/11/2023	31/12/2022
Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank	AIIB	President	07/12/2023	Not included	Not included	Not included
Caribbean Development Bank	CDB	President	07/12/2023	Not included	Not included	Not included
Central American Bank for Economic Integration	CABEI	Executive President	07/12/2023	Not included	Not included	Not included
Development Bank of Latin America	CAF	President	07/12/2023	Not included	Not included	Not included
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development	EBRD	President	07/12/2023	Not included	Not included	Not included
European Investment Bank	EIB	President	07/12/2023	Not included	Not included	Not included
Food and Agriculture Organization	FAO	Director-General	07/12/2023	Did not provide data	07/07/2023	17/03/2023
Inter-American Development Bank	IDB	President	07/12/2023	Board of Executive Directors	10/08/2023	10/08/2023
Inter-Parliamentary Union	IPU	President	07/12/2023	Executive Committee	12/10/2023	05/06/2023
International Atomic Energy Agency	IAEA	Director General	07/12/2023	Board of Governors	10/2023	24/07/2023
International Civil Aviation Organization	ICAO	Secretary General	07/12/2023	ICAO Council	13/06/2023	13/06/2023
International Energy Agency	IEA	Executive Director	07/12/2023	Did not provide data	Did not provide data	Did not provide data
International Fund for Agricultural Development	IFAD	President	07/12/2023	Governing Council	30/06/2023	30/06/2023
International Labor Organization	ILO	Director General	07/12/2023	ILO Governing Body	06/2023	31/12/2022
International Maritime Organization	IMO	Secretary-General	07/12/2023	IMO Assembly	12/2021	16/06/2023
International Monetary Fund	IMF	Managing Director	07/12/2023	Board of Directors	30/06/2023	30/06/2023
International Organization for Migration	IOM	Director General	07/12/2023	Not included	Not included	Not included
International Telecommunications Union	ITU	Secretary-General	07/12/2023	Council	Council Meeting 2023	16/06/2023
International Trade Center	ITC	Executive Director	07/12/2023	Does not apply	Does not apply	19/07/2023
Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS	UNAIDS	Executive Director	07/12/2023	Not included	Not included	Not included
Office of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights	OHCHR	High Commissioner	07/12/2023	Does not apply	Does not apply	20/07/2023
Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development	OECD	Secretary-General	07/12/2023	OECD Council	20/07/2023	20/07/2023
UN Children's Fund	UNICEF	Executive Director	07/12/2023	Executive Board	16/10/2023	10/2022
UN Conference on Trade and Development	UNCTAD	Secretary-General	07/12/2023	Trade and Development Board	13/07/2023	14/06/2023
UN Department of Peace Operations	DPO	Under Secretary General	07/12/2023	Not included	Not included	Not included

ORGANIZATION	ACRONYM	HEAD		GOVERNING BODY		SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM
		POSITION	DATA VALIDITY DATE	NAME	DATA VALIDITY DATE	DATA VALIDITY DATE
UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs	DPPA	Under Secretary General	07/12/2023	Not included	Not included	Not included
UN Development Coordination Office	DCO	Assistant Secretary-General	07/12/2023	Not included	Not included	Not included
UN Development Programme	UNDP	Administrator	07/12/2023	Executive Board	06/09/2023	6/2023
UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	UNESCO	Director-General	07/12/2023	Did not provide data	Did not provide data	Did not provide data
UN Environment Programme	UNEP	Executive Director	07/12/2023	UN Environment Assembly	13/07/2023	30/06/2023
UN Framework Convention on Climate Change	UNFCCC	Executive Secretary	07/12/2023	Bureau of the COP, CMP and CMA	19/07/2023	19/07/2023
UN General Assembly	UNGA	President	07/12/2023	General Assembly	30/10/2023	Does not apply
UN High Commissioner for Refugees	UNHCR	High Commissioner	07/12/2023	Did not provide data	Did not provide data	01/07/2023
UN Industrial Development Organization	UNIDO	Director General	07/12/2023	Did not provide data	03/12/2021	31/12/2022
UN Office for Disarmament Affairs	UNODA	Director-General	07/12/2023	Does not apply	Does not apply	21/06/2023
UN Office for Project Services	UNOPS	Director-General	07/12/2023	Not included	Not included	Not included
UN Office in Geneva	UNOG	High Representative	07/12/2023	Does not apply	Does not apply	07/08/2023
UN Office in Nairobi	UNON	Executive Director	07/12/2023	Does not apply	Does not apply	01/05/2023
UN Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	OCHA	Under Secretary General	07/12/2023	Not included	Not included	Not included
UN Office on Drugs and Crime	UNODC	Director-General	07/12/2023	Did not provide data	Did not provide data	24/07/2023
UN Population Fund	UNFPA	Executive Director	07/12/2023	Executive Board	21/06/2023	21/06/2023
UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East	UNRWA	Director	07/12/2023	Not included	Not included	Not included
UN Secretariat	UN Secretariat	Secretary General	07/12/2023	Does not apply	Does not apply	31/08/2023
UN Women	UN Women	Executive Director	07/12/2023	Executive Board	01/09/2023	6/1/2023
UN-HABITAT	UN-Habitat	Executive Director	07/12/2023	Not included	Not included	Not included
West African Development Bank	WADB	President	07/12/2023	Not included	Not included	Not included
World Bank Group	WBG	President	07/12/2023	Board of Directors	12/10/2023	21/09/2023
World Food Programme	WFP	Executive Director	07/12/2023	Executive Board	30/06/2023	31/05/2023
World Health Organization	WHO	Director-General	07/12/2023	Executive Board	02/08/2023	31/12/2022
World Intellectual Property Organization	WIPO	Director General	07/12/2023	Did not provide data	Did not provide data	27/06/23
World Meteorological Organization	WMO	Secretary-General	07/12/2023	Congress	30/08/2023	30/08/2023
World Trade Organization	WTO	Director-General	07/12/2023	Did not provide data	Did not provide data	12/10/2023

Digging Deeper

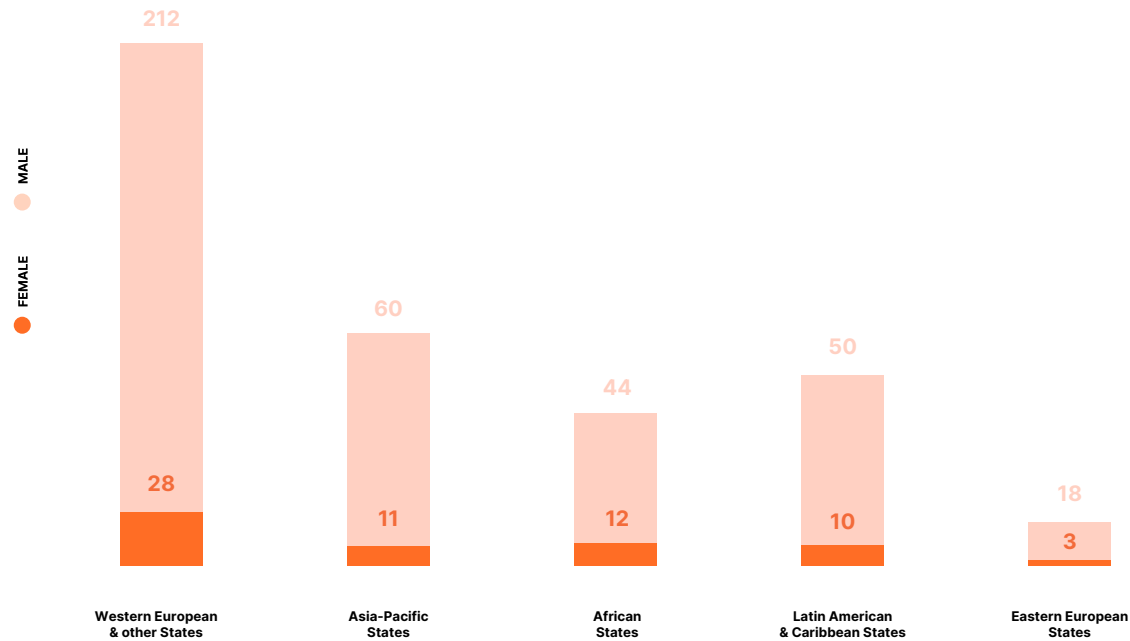
After decades of inertia, gender parity gains momentum

Share of female and male elected leaders by decade



Women are underrepresented across the globe

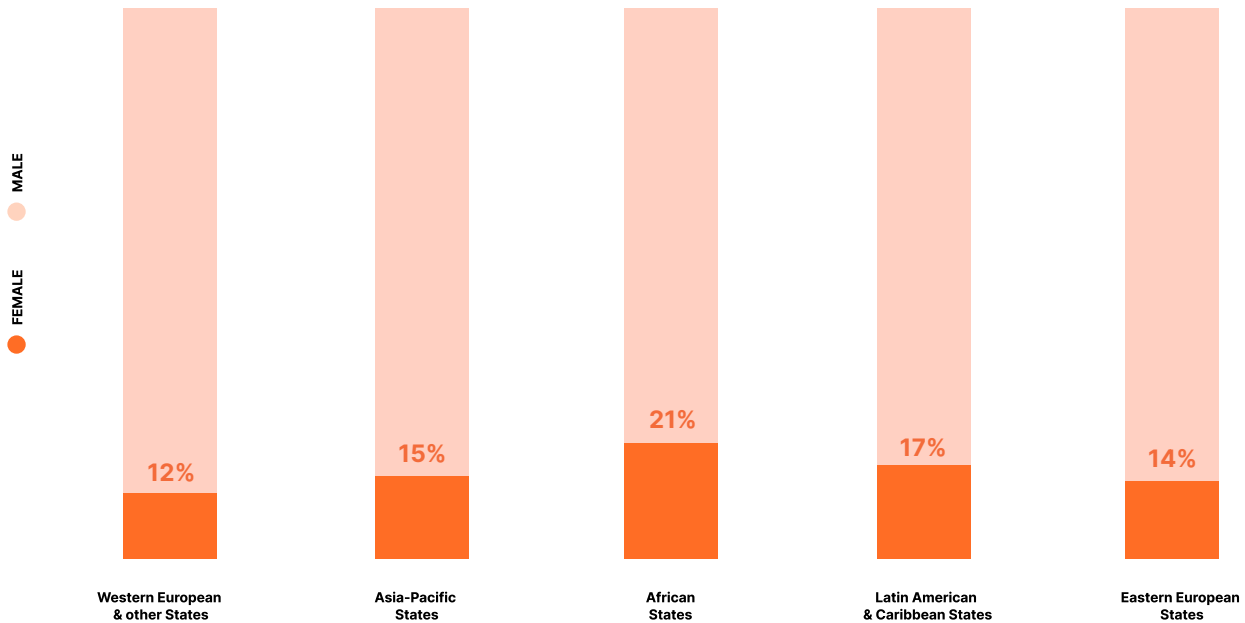
Total number of female and male multilateral organization heads by region of origin since 1945.



THIS ANALYSIS DOES NOT INCLUDE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT BANKS

Women are underrepresented across the globe

Share of female and male multilateral organization heads by region of origin since 1945.



THIS ANALYSIS DOES NOT INCLUDE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT BANKS

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

Why did we do this?

The Imperative of Gender Equality in Multilateral Decision-Making

GWL Voices strongly believes that an effective, strong and inclusive international system needs to be based on the equal representation of women in spaces where decisions are made. It is a matter of demographic fairness and also an issue of efficiency and positive impact. There are at least eight benefits associated with a gender-equal international system:

1. Inclusivity and diversity in decision-making

Promoting inclusivity and diversity in decision-making contributes to well-rounded and informed choices by incorporating a broad range of perspectives.

2. Addressing power imbalances

Increased representation of women enables their contributions to innovative policies and norms, rectifying gender power imbalances. This leads to more balanced and equitable decision-making structures.

3. Enhanced problem-solving

Gender equality encourages diverse thinking, resulting in innovative and effective problem-solving strategies. Inclusive decision-making processes draw upon numerous experiences and insights, further improving the quality and sustainability of decisions.

4. Reflecting global realities

A gender-equal international system ensures that decision-making bodies reflect the diverse realities across the world. Organizations benefit from leadership that understands and addresses the unique challenges faced by people of all genders.

5. Improved organizational culture

Gender equality fosters a positive organizational culture by promoting collaboration, respect, and mutual understanding. Inclusive environments enhance the overall effectiveness and relevance of international organizations.

6. Legitimacy and credibility

International organizations gain greater legitimacy and credibility when their leadership reflects the diversity of the communities they serve. A feminist perspective reinforces the commitment to human rights and equality, strengthening the organization's moral authority.

7. Long-term sustainable development

Gender equality is recognized as a crucial component of sustainable development. Decision-making that integrates equity and equality principles contributes to policies and strategies that promote long-term social, economic, and environmental sustainability.

8. Global reputation and partnerships

International organizations that prioritize gender equality are likely to build stronger global partnerships. Demonstrating a commitment to gender equality and women's rights principles enhances an organization's reputation, fostering collaboration with governments, NGOs, and other stakeholders.

Gender-balanced and women's leadership in decision-making within international organizations aligns with principles of equality and justice. It also results in practical benefits, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of global issues, promoting innovative solutions, and contributing to a more just and sustainable world.



www.gwlvoices.com