



Who Decides : Women's Participation in the UN Climate Change Convention

It's been just over 10 years since the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) committed to striving for gender balance in their delegations to the climate negotiations and in other decision-making bodies, and this year will be the 10th Conference of the Parties (COP) since that COP18 goal.

At a glance:

- ➔ 120 UNFCCC decisions mention gender, with 51 of them specifically referencing gender balance in decision-making processes, but progress toward gender balance in UNFCCC spaces has not been consistent or significant.
- ➔ Women's participation in the climate negotiations continues to fall short of gender balance, with COP27 having 35% women's participation on Party delegations and 10 out of 17 UNFCCC constituted bodies having women's membership of 35% or less.
- ➔ Parties need to take concrete actions to improve women's participation and leadership if gender balance in delegations is to be achieved before the current trajectory of 2042.

1

Why track women's leadership in climate change decision-making?

Women's participation in climate and environmental decision-making is a human right. Their participation is not only crucial (and has been proven) to create more robust, stronger environmental outcomes, but also must be inherent in decision-making processes to fulfill this right. Tracking women's participation in the Conference of Parties, the supreme decision-making body of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as well as the subsidiary body¹ meetings (such as the Bonn Climate Change Conference), enables us to identify and address persisting inequalities.

The UNFCCC has recognized the importance of women's participation in several key decisions. In fact, the first gender-specific decision in the UNFCCC in 2001 was not about gender mainstreaming across areas of the negotiations or the gendered dimensions of climate change as experienced by communities, but about "improving the participation of women in the representation of Parties in bodies." In 2012, Parties adopted a goal of gender balance for the technically focused constituted bodies (for example, the Adaptation Committee and Technology Executive Committee), and invited Parties to strive for that goal in their delegations to the negotiations.

The first Gender Action Plan (2017) and the current [Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender and its Gender Action Plan](#) (GAP, 2019), the UNFCCC's key initiative for a gender-responsive approach to climate change, have priority areas on "gender balance, participation, and women's leadership." As first stated in 2017, "the GAP seeks to achieve and sustain the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the UNFCCC process." These decisions,² though, have not yielded urgent and significant change in overall representation. They have showcased the timeliness of this issue, but progress continues to be slow and inconsistent.

Thus, it is essential to develop, collect and share quantitative and qualitative data on women's participation to track progress and facilitate accountability regarding these decisions. In 2012, the UNFCCC launched [an annual report on gender composition](#), and in 2016, WEDO launched the [Gender Climate Tracker](#) (GCT), which analyzes and follows women's participation, highlighting gender disparities throughout UNFCCC Parties and bodies. To foster gender balance and advance women's leadership, data needs to be current, accurate, and accessible to advocates, negotiators and decision-makers.

¹ Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) and Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA)

Gender Climate Tracker (GCT)



**GENDER
CLIMATE
TRACKER**

WEDO has been tracking women's participation data in the UNFCCC negotiations since 2008, and in 2016, the GCT first made this data publicly available. The GCT website and app, available via the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#), allows anyone to view the history of women's participation in their Party delegations, noting the number of delegates and whether the head of delegation identified as a woman or a man. [The GCT website](#) allows these data to be [selected and compared](#) among Parties across specific negotiation sessions, as well as presents an additional, comparable [visualization](#) of the constituted bodies' membership data over time. The GCT also provides information and data on gender in climate policy-making and planning.

2

The UNFCCC has promoted women's "full, equal, and meaningful participation." Has women's participation been increasing?

In 2008, the first year that the GCT collected data on Party delegations to the negotiations disaggregated by sex, COP14 had 31% women's participation and 82% of Party delegations had more men than women. With the latest data from 2022, very few Party delegations have equal numbers of men and women, while the majority of delegations remain dominated by men. At COP27, 35% of Party delegates were women, a less than 5 percentage point improvement, and 77% of Party delegations still had more men than women.²

While the percentage of Party delegates who were women was slightly greater at COP27 than COP26 (by .6 percentage points), these proportions are lower than pre-pandemic COPs. In 2018 and 2019, participation was 38% and 37%, respectively, and in 2019, only 70% of delegations had more men than women. This unevenly slow improvement, at times even setbacks, demonstrates the lack of commitment to achieving gender balance in the UNFCCC. More Party delegates attended COP27 than COP26, and COP26 was a larger COP than COP25, with COP27 nearly twice the size as COP25. Parties are bringing thousands more delegates to participate in the negotiations, but they are not bringing more women. Parties as a whole are not prioritizing gender balance in their delegations.

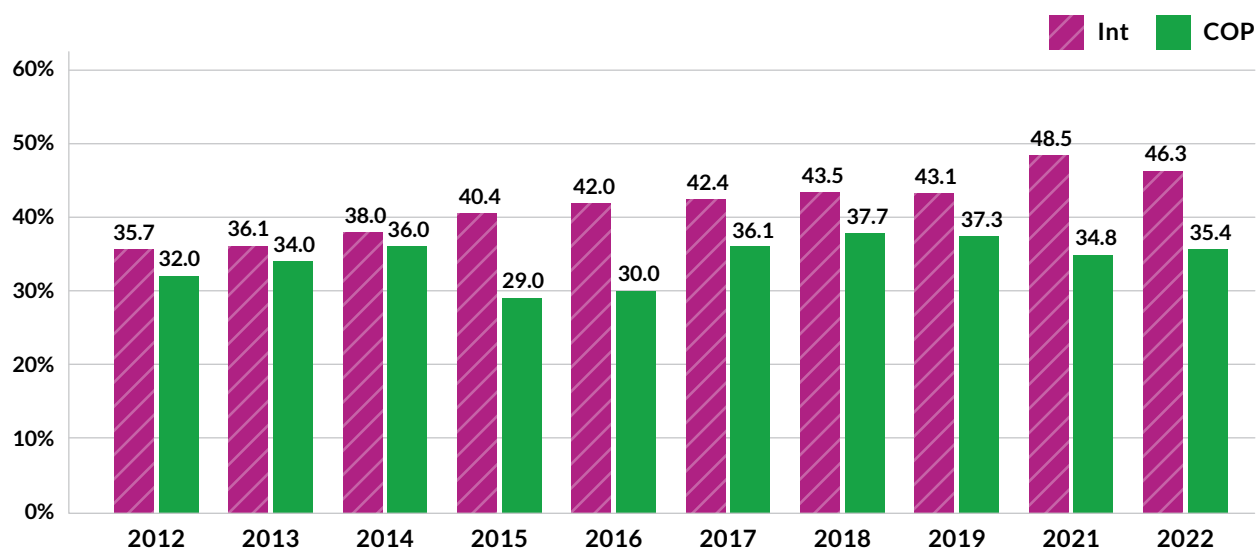
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² The GCT does not track data on women's and men's participation as non-Party observers.

A similar phenomenon occurs in the UNFCCC constituted bodies. UNFCCC’s 17 constituted bodies exist to provide expertise, technical input and advice to further the implementation of the Convention, Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement.³ These bodies are supported by the UNFCCC Secretariat. In their composition, [tracked by the UNFCCC](#) but visualized over time on the [Gender Climate Tracker website](#) and app, there has been some general but again inconsistent improvement.

Only 4 out of 17 constituted bodies have 50% or more women’s participation (Adaptation Committee, Paris Committee on Capacity Building, WIM Executive Committee and the Facilitative Working Group). The Adaptation Committee has the highest women’s representation (81%) and is the only body that has shown a consistent increase throughout the years (56% in 2020 and 63% in 2021). With only 10% women’s participation, the bodies with lowest women’s participation were the Technology Executive Committee (TEC) and the Executive Board of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM Executive Board). TEC in particular demonstrates a lack of progress, having reached its all time high in 2018 with 40% women’s participation and showing a gradual decline since then. Overall, women’s representation on constituted bodies averaged 39% in 2022.

FIGURE 1
Percentage of Women Delegates on Party Delegations for Intersessionals & COP



*The 2021 intersessional was held virtually as a non-decision making space, but marked the greatest percentage of women registrants to a negotiation session ever.

**When more than one intersessional negotiation was held in a year, the percentage reflects the total number of women delegates divided by the total number of delegates to all intersessional meetings.

³ Adaptation Committee, Article 6.4 Supervisory Body (Paris Agreement), Adaptation Fund Board, Advisory Board of the Climate Technology Centre and Network (CTCN), Executive Board of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), Compliance Committee, Consultative Group of Experts, Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage, Joint Implementation Supervisory Committee (JISC), Katowice Committee of Experts on the Impacts of the Implementation of Response Measures (KCI), Least Developed Countries Expert Group (LEG), Facilitative Working Group (FWG) of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform, Standing Committee on Finance (SCF), Technology Executive Committee (TEC) and The Paris Committee on Capacity-building (PCCB).

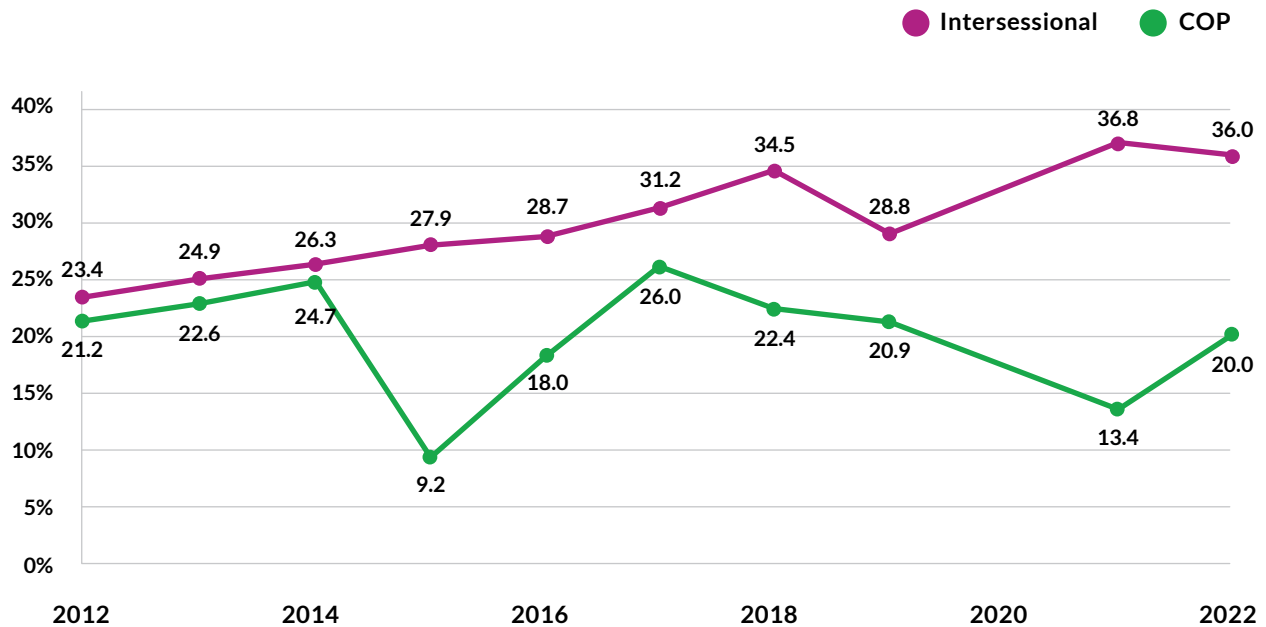
3

How does women’s participation vary across different types of meetings and within decision-making structures?

In the negotiations, participation trends suggest that women tend to gain power in spaces where decision-making is deemed less pivotal and/or where countries prioritize the participation of Ministerial level delegates. At the Bonn Climate Change Conference, a smaller UNFCCC intersessional meeting, there is a consistently greater proportion of women than the COPs held within the same year. The number of women serving as Heads of Delegation is always lower at COP than at the intersessionals in any given year.

FIGURE 2

Percentage of Women as Heads of Delegation



Higher rates of women’s participation were observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the Bonn Intersessional was held virtually. This jump in participation could indicate greater interest by women in following the UNFCCC, while Parties, at the moment of allocating resources for delegates, choose to support the travel of more male delegates. The Intersessionals are also a smaller space focused on technical negotiations (1,785 Party delegates in 2022), while COP continues to grow steadily larger, with COP27 being the largest yet with 11,953 Party delegates.

In the UNFCCC constituted bodies, it appears that a key variable is the topic that the body covers, as areas such as adaptation have consistently strong women’s participation rates, while technology, mitigation, and finance-focused bodies continue to see significantly lower numbers, such as the aforementioned 10% women’s participation in the TEC and CDM Executive Board,

and 35% in the Standing Committee on Finance. Observed trends suggest that this discrepancy is related to both narrative assumptions of women and gender issues as related solely to livelihoods and resilience, making gender issues more widely prevalent in policy-making around adaptation and capacity building and speaking to the need for Parties to identify and nominate women experts in every field of climate work. The bodies with the highest women’s participation in 2022 were the Adaptation Committee (81%), Facilitative Working Group (64%), and the Paris Committee on Capacity Building (58%).⁴

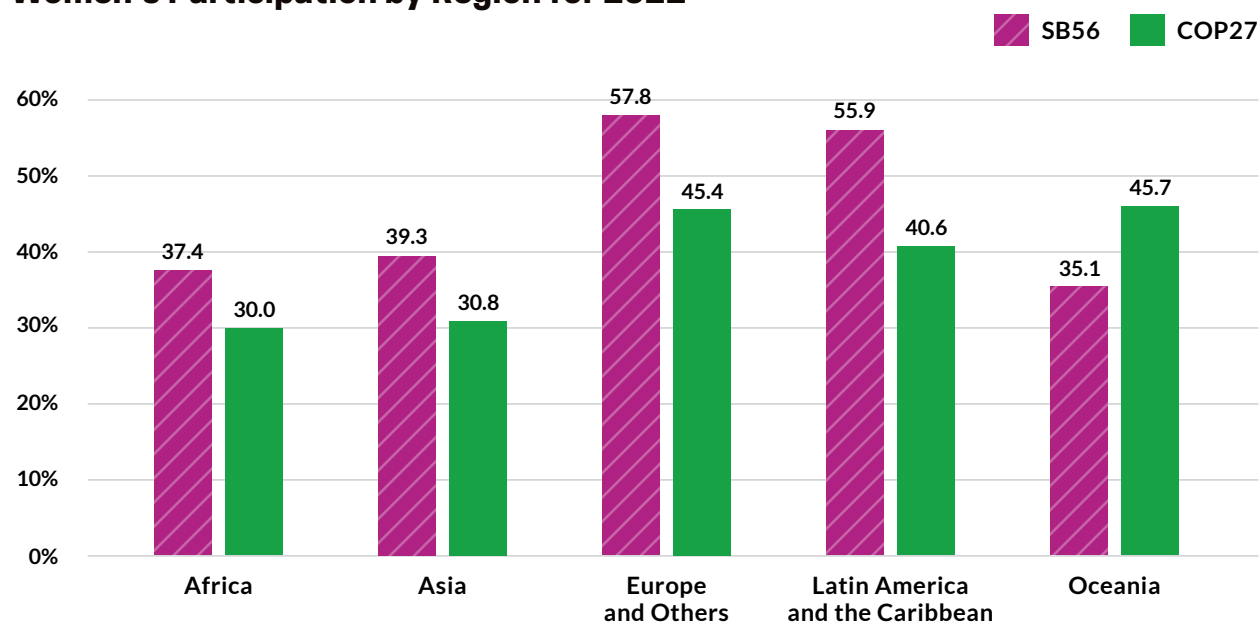
4 How does women’s participation vary by region?

There are 198 Parties to the UNFCCC, and Parties’ individual histories of gender balance vary widely—on the GCT app or [website](#), each Party’s history can be viewed. When looking at women’s participation by geographical area, existing inequities regarding resources, regional power differentials, and historical issues regarding representation may have a profound impact on the differences between men and women’s participation.

Africa and Asia tend to have lower women’s participation (with 30% and 31% respectively for COP27), while Europe and Others⁵, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Oceania tend to have higher participation rates (with 45%, 41% and 46% respectively for COP27).

FIGURE 3

Women’s Participation by Region for 2022



⁴ UNFCCC Gender composition and progress on implementation (FCCC/CP/2022/3). Retrieved from https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cp2022_03E.pdf

⁵ Europe and Others includes the UN Subregions of Australia/New Zealand and Northern America (Canada and the United States), as well as Israel and Turkey.

These differences can also be seen when looking at participation across UNFCCC negotiating blocks, with countries from the African Group, Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and OPEC typically having less representation of women on national delegations at COP27. For example, only three out of the 44 LDC national delegations present at COP27 achieved gender balance.

5

How does women's participation connect to women's leadership in the UNFCCC?

The “full, equal and meaningful participation” of women requires not only achieving gender balance among delegations, but also guaranteeing women have the same place of power in any climate negotiations, including as leaders. However, women are less likely to be in positions of power than they are to participate in any delegation or body.

For example, at COP27, 20% of Heads of Delegation were women. While once again better than COP26 (13%), this proportion was lower than COP23, COP24, and COP25. COP presidents have also been historically men, with only four women thus far acting as COP president (15%). Similarly, nine out of the 17 constituted bodies under the UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement have at least one woman chair or co-chair (52%). Three of the 11 co-chairmanships (or chair and vice-chair pairs) are all women, five are all men, and three are gender mixed.

Women's participation as Party delegates also does not mean they will have a space for sharing their expertise and opinions during the negotiations. Case studies of sex-disaggregated speaking time⁶ (not tracked consistently) show that women are often, but not always, less represented during the negotiations. Strong gender differences exist between different areas of the negotiations—for example, finance, gender, technology, adaptation, etc.—when it comes to speaking roles and time. Areas such as adaptation have consistently strong women's participation rates, while technology (27% of the speaking time and 13 women speakers compared to 17 male speakers in TEC) and finance-focused bodies (40% of the speaking time and 11 women speakers compared to 16 male speakers) continue to see lower numbers.⁷

While improving the percentage of women at the table and ensuring their voices may improve gender-specific climate needs and solutions being integrated into the climate negotiations, increasing women's representation and leadership is not the same as developing gender-transformative climate action. Being a woman does not guarantee expertise on the gender-climate nexus. The gendered dimensions of climate change should be considered cross-sectorally and with intersectionality, guided by experts on the subject. Only by valuing women's participation and leadership as well as gender expertise can we create comprehensive, inclusive climate solutions that challenge current power structures and advance gender equality.

⁶ UNFCCC Gender composition and progress on implementation (FCCC/CP/2022/3). Retrieved from https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cp2022_03E.pdf

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Recommendations:

The statistics in this brief on the current lack of women's participation in the UNFCCC, and lack of progress toward women's full, equal, and meaningful participation, are only useful if they inform and catalyze concrete action. Parties cannot assume that this disparity will simply fix itself over time—the majority of Parties must answer the call, one so often agreed upon by all Parties in their UNFCCC decisions, to truly prioritize women's participation. At the current rate, gender balance in Party delegations to COP will not be attained until 2042, while, given the fluctuations, there is no forecastable future where COP Heads of Delegations will achieve gender balance.

To accelerate progress, Parties must focus on women's participation in their delegations and any nominations to constituted bodies:

1. **Parties should actively integrate women delegates into Party delegations.** Parties with gender-balanced delegations should share their experiences and advocate to other Parties, further cementing the correlation between curtailing climate change and achieving gender equality.
2. **Parties should critically examine the gender composition of decision-makers and/or leadership teams** within the key ministries, departments, and/or units contributing to the negotiations and implementation of the UNFCCC. By reflecting these gendered considerations and striving for gender balance in professional development strategies or mentorship and training programs, the gender-balance of these units may improve and thus be ultimately reflected in delegations.
3. **Parties should provide transparent avenues for professional development and leadership opportunities in the negotiations,** from supporting succession planning for Heads of Delegation to ensure women are able to step into those roles, to building thematic expertise and putting forth women as thematic coordinators, to nominating and supporting women to membership and chairship positions within constituted bodies.
4. **Parties should guarantee full, equal and meaningful participation of women delegates by actively building capacity,** knowledge management, diplomacy and communication skills for their respective negotiation areas, particularly negotiation areas that have been historically male-dominated.

At this time when Party delegations continue to grow in size, there is a great opportunity to intentionally reflect on what that should mean for the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of the negotiations.