



Expanding women's participation and leadership in public institutions

This note is an information update on priority initiatives implemented by UNDP in support of strengthening gender equality in public institutions. A leading global initiative is the Gender Equality in Public Administration (GEPA) program, currently implemented by UNDP's global Gender team, in collaboration with the UNDP Oslo Governance Centre and our partners, the University of Pittsburgh. This note provides a snapshot of the GEPA research initiative and UNDP's work to enhance gender equality in public administration through the UNDP Gender Equality Seal Award for Public Institutions.

Introduction

Women have the right to participate in decision making. Article 7 of CEDAW stipulates that all states parties take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life and ensure that women hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government.¹ The internationally agreed target of a minimum of 30% women in leadership positions affirmed in the **Beijing Platform of Action**² 25 years ago, applies to public administration but women remain underrepresented in decision-making in public administration.

More recently, through the adoption of Member States of Agenda 2030, SDG 16 "promoting just, peaceful and inclusive societies" and Goal 5 "ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment," recognized the role of gender equality and inclusive public administration and institutions in achieving more peaceful, prosperous, equal and sustainable societies. Institutions need to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision making that meet the needs of populations and ensure citizens' participation. Data is essential in identifying trends and shaping targeted and effective policy responses, that is why UNDP together with its partners promoted the adoption of an indicator that would track the representativeness of decision making positions in public institutions including the public service – now incorporated as **SDG indicator 16.7.1**.³ Sex-disaggregated data is vital for understanding both the drivers and barriers to achieving gender equality in decision-making and tracking the achievement of the SDGs. The data also provides a nuanced picture in terms of intersectionality, since data is also disaggregated by age, disability and population group. An important complement to the data for SDG 16.7.1 focused on representation in decision making is **SDG 16.7.2** which measures the responsiveness of decision making using perceptions based survey data.⁴ UNDP as the custodian agency for this indicator has assumed additional responsibilities to support countries monitor and report on their progress.⁵

¹ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>

² https://beijing20.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/pfa_e_final_web.pdf

³ (SDG indicator 16.7.1 (b): Proportions of positions (by age group, sex, persons with disabilities and population groups) in public institutions (national and local), including (a) the legislatures; (b) the public service; and (c) the judiciary, compared to national distributions

⁴ SDG indicator 16.7.2: Proportion of the population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group. UNDP is the custodian for this indicator. <https://www.undp.org/content/oslo-governance-centre/en/home/our-focus/sdg-16.html>

⁵ <https://www.undp.org/content/oslo-governance-centre/en/home/our-focus/sdg-16.html>

Public administration is the bedrock of government and the central instrument through which national policies and programmes are implemented. Public administration should be representative of society and serve as a model where women and men equally participate and lead, including in decision-making. This is particularly crucial **in the context of COVID as inclusive decision making** is key to recovery. *“When women have less decision-making power than men, either in households or in government, then women’s needs during an epidemic are less likely to be met”*.⁶ Governments with women in elected and administrative leadership positions are likely better prepared to meet women’s needs and protect women’s rights during the COVID-19 pandemic⁷.

The Global Initiative on Gender Equality in Public Administration

In 2014, UNDP published the **Gender Equality in Public Administration report**⁸, the first comprehensive report on the state of GEPA globally, to examine the challenges and opportunities for strengthening gender equality in public administration.⁹ The report was based on a global GEPA dataset, as well as 13 case study countries. The key findings and recommendations from the report serve as an important baseline for the 2020 GEPA global study that will be launched in February 2021. Briefly the findings of the 2014 report showed that across all regions, women were underrepresented at top levels of public administration; women held less than 30% of decision-making positions and in 7 of the 13 case study countries, women occupied 15% or less of decision-making positions. Constitutions, national legislation and policies, including those governing the public administration, were often discriminatory, both overtly and systemically and women hit glass ceilings and glass walls that prevented their equal participation in decision-making positions. For example they were not promoted upwards into decision making positions; they were concentrated in particular ministries or sectors (eg culture, education, health and tourism), whilst security, finance and environment were dominated by men. Furthermore, the organisational cultures of many public administrations (stereotypes, human resource practices, etc.) often disadvantaged women.

The GEPA 2014 recommendations included

1. Strengthening the constitutional, legislative and policy frameworks to promote gender equality
 - Reviewing and harmonising relevant laws, policies and regulations in public administration
 - Development and implementation of temporary special measures.
2. Promoting institutional change within public administration
 - Bringing about change in organisational culture, including human resource policies (recruitment, retention, promotion, performance, work-life, capacity-building, networking).
 - Building capacity and commitment to collect and analyse data to improve accountability.
3. Promoting linkages with the broader gender equality agenda
 - Addressing systemic gender-based discrimination and bias.
 - Supporting women’s education and preparedness for civil service careers, with a focus on young women

⁶ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30526-2/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30526-2/fulltext)

⁷ Al-Rashid, S. 2020. “COVID-19: time for gender inclusive decision-making”. OECD Development matters. <https://oecd-development-matters.org/2020/04/21/covid-19-time-for-gender-inclusive-decision-making/> (and cited in I Muhammadi (Aug 2020) Gender Inclusive Decision-making and the COVID-19 Recovery: literature review for UNDP GEPA project (unpublished)

⁸ https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/public_administration/gepa.html

⁹ Gender Equality in Public Administration - GEPA, Phase I Project Brief, UNDP 2014

<https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/democratic-governance-and-peacebuilding/responsive-and-accountable-institutions/GEPA/>

- Highlighting that women’s empowerment and leadership in public administration benefits not only women but public administration as a whole.

Since 2014, the GEPA program has continued to build capacity to track data, build evidence and develop actions for addressing the challenges. In 2015 the **UNDP-OECD methodology for evaluating GEPA in public life and public administration**,¹⁰ was developed, using data mapping and a perception survey for national and sub-national assessments of gender equality. Subsequent case studies were carried out, including in Myanmar, where the UNDP-OECD methodology was unique in being implemented at the subnational level, as well as national level.¹¹ In 2017, the **McKinsey UNDP Gender Diversity In the state: A Development Accelerator?**¹² study explored the impact of parity within the civil service on public administration performance and provided evidence that access to healthcare and to sanitation have correlations with women’s participation in public administration – particularly relevant in the current COVID scenario, and the lack of women’s voices in COVID response bodies.

Towards the 2020 GEPA report: State of the Data 2015-2020 global update

UNDP is currently revisiting the first 2014 GEPA report findings and recommendations, updating the 2014 GEPA report by analysing data collected globally with the University of Pittsburgh over the past 5 years. The 2020 dataset covers 167 countries – a significant expansion from the data from 35 countries in the 2014 study. Recognizing that there was a need to improve the data to provide sectoral and demographic employment trends, since the release of the UNDP Global Report GEPA report in 2014, the Gender Inequality Research Lab (GIRL) research team at the University of Pittsburgh has been collaborating with UNDP to track publicly available sex disaggregated GEPA data.

As at **September 2020, the GEPA Gender Parity in the Civil Service (Gen-PaCS) Database** features data from 167 countries between the years 1951 and 2020. 2020 GEPA data availability has increased significantly in both size and scope compared to the 2014 GEPA Global Report. Combined, these sources allow for intersectional analyses of public administration employment patterns and allow for the examination of GEPA across sectors of government. The 2020 report will analyse the trends using this updated data. The launch of the 2020 Global GEPA report is planned for March 2021.

Gender Equality in the Public Administration in Latin America

Regional studies are also being undertaken to supplement global level analysis including in Latin America. This regional GEPA report¹³ collects and analyses information about the proportion of women in public management positions in public administration. It provides an assessment of the availability (and quality) of sex-disaggregated data in management posts of 18 Latin American countries public administrations drawing from data collected between 2017 and 2018. The study identified significant problems with reliability of data and recommended the need for gender tracking mechanisms in public administration, particularly country specific studies which help monitor the progress of each country to achieving SDG 16.7.1.

Despite the problems affecting the quality of the data, the study identified a clear trend: women are represented in lower proportions than men in public management positions, whereas they represent about

¹⁰ See the UNDP-OECD methodology in Gender Equality In Public Administration Myanmar case Study: Where are women in the civil service in Myanmar public administration? UNDP Myanmar 2020

¹¹ Gender Equality In Public Administration Myanmar case Study: Where are women in the civil service in Myanmar public administration? UNDP Myanmar 2020

¹² https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/public_administration/gender-diversity-in-the-state.html

¹³ Gender Equality in the Public Administration in Latin America, UNDP RBLAC 2020 (to be published)

half of public sector employment. Upper management positions are determined by political and personal ties rather than job performance. Whilst many countries have Gender Equality Acts and equal opportunities in legislation, these are insufficient. The barriers include stereotypical attitudes and perceptions, lack of care facilities and absence of mentoring. Thus, affirmative actions – including parity and quotas - are key to incorporate women at the top of public management.

Gender equality in public administration Europe and Central Asia: Summary of progress on data availability (2017-2020)

In partnership with UNDP, the Gender Inequality Research Lab (GIRL) research team at the University of Pittsburgh has also been tracking publicly available GEPA data in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region collected by each country. Data presented in the report as of August 2020 include and build upon previous data tracking efforts in the ECA region, such as Gender Equality in Public Administration: A snapshot of Eastern Europe and Central Asia (2017).¹⁴ The ECA 2020 report offers an update of the publicly available sex-disaggregated public administration data in the region; second; it focuses on gender parity in decision-making levels across different sectors of public administration; and third, it presents the gaps in sex-disaggregated data in public administration as a means to set the stage for SDG 16.7.1b reporting, required of member states.

The report found an increase in the availability and quality of sex disaggregated GEPA data in the region, allowing for analysis of glass ceilings and glass walls. However, there is sporadic reporting of intersectional sex disaggregated public administration data which makes it difficult to analyse the impact of intersecting inequalities on women's ability to access decision making positions. The report found a huge variation in women in public administration across the region. The report recommends systematic collection and reporting of intersectional sex disaggregated public administration data, including at decision making levels and across ministries.

Along with qualitative data provided by the OECD methodology and secondary research by University of Pittsburgh, the global and regional GEPA data will help to provide evidence and analyse the challenges and the actions for ways forward.

Towards more gender responsive public institutions: UNDP Gender Equality Seal Award for Public Institutions

To support public institutions to mainstream gender and become more inclusive, the UNDP Gender Equality Seal Award for Public Institutions is being developed by the UNDP Gender Team.¹⁵ This initiative aims to incentivize public institutions to meet rigorous standards through an action plan for improvement relating to public policies, programmes and budgets; leadership; and enabling work environments. The Award programme links with the Gender Equality in Public Administration (GEPA) initiative which tracks gender parity in public administration, in different sectors and ministries. The Award programme includes a parity indicator aligned to GEPA. The initiative provides public institutions with a roadmap to build capacities, and implement institutional reforms to ensure gender concerns are integrated into their work on the SDGs. Public entities that meet these standards will be eligible for the Gender Equality Seal Award in Public Institutions, a global recognition of their role as key actors in the promotion of Agenda 2030.

¹⁴ <https://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/library/gender-equality/gender-equality-in-public-administration---snapshot-of-eastern-e.html>

¹⁵ The UNDP Gender Equality Award for Public Institutions has been piloted and is expected to be launch by the end of 2020. This initiative is built upon successful experiences from [UNDP's Gender Equality Seal corporate certification process](#). Contact: GenderSeal@UNDP.org

The initiative supports institutions to mainstream gender, eradicate discriminatory practices such as sexual harassment and strengthen the internal working environment of public institutions. It enables increased transparency, accountability and public institutions more responsive to citizens to deliver the SDG gender equality agenda. These aspects are critical in the next phase of the Covid response – in building public trust, enabling governments and civil society to work together to advance social cohesion and gender equality. A key area of assessment is on active and participatory citizenship in the policy cycle and accountability of institutions. It includes benchmarks including whether the institution has a budget targeted to promoting gender equality and women’s human rights and empowerment; as well as that the institution has contributed to national reporting on CEDAW, Beijing, and other international instruments on gender equality.

The benchmarks to advance gender equality within public institutions are based on the SDGs, the requirements of States Parties through the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, and evidence about what actually works to advance gender equality in public institutions.

Conclusion

UNDP is taking a number of innovative steps towards ensuring women’s full and effective participation in decision-making in public life. This is particularly crucial in the context of COVID as the systemic lack of women in policy decisions means that many governments will be ill-equipped to meet half the population’s needs during this time. As women continue to hit glass ceilings and glass walls preventing their equal participation in decision making, tracking these trends and providing evidence are critical, as well as mapping organizational barriers, understanding organizational cultures and opportunities for change. UNDP will be supporting countries in collecting and reporting data on 16.7.1.b in 2021 which provides an opportunity for countries to reflect on and design their policies for a more inclusive and representative public service. The 2020 GEPA report is expected to serve as a catalyst for policy and programming designed to accelerate women’s equal participation and leadership in public administration. UNDP’s unique Gender Equality Seal Award for Public Institutions approach to mainstreaming gender, offers a way practical roadmap for change.

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