



UN FIELD MISSIONS – SENIOR WOMEN LEADERS

UN WOMEN POLICY BRIEF FEBRUARY 2015

The **strategic results framework on women and peace and security** presented by the Secretary-General to the Security Council in 2011 (S/2011/598) included specific targets to increase the proportion of senior positions (P5 and above) held by women in United Nations entities operating in conflict and post-conflict situations. The target for 2014 was 30 percent, and **40 percent by 2020**.

The SG's annual reports on women, peace and security report **women's share of senior positions in UN field missions**, and the **target for 2014 had not been met**. 19 percent of missions were headed by a woman SRSG (a number that has ranged from as low as 15 percent in 2012 to as high as 21 percent in 2011), 15 percent of missions had a woman deputy (down from 18 percent in 2010 and 2011), and women's share of P5-D2 posts in field missions was 21 percent in peacekeeping missions, 24 percent in political and peacebuilding missions, and 38 percent in other UN entities. **This falls far short not only of the abovementioned targets, but the overall UN target to reach parity in all staff categories and all entities.**

As early as **1970**, the UN General Assembly began to recognize the need for gender balance and pushing the organization to improve its gender representation. **Ten resolutions** have been adopted since then, including successive resolutions calling for **parity across the organization since 1995**, and a 2003 resolution asking for parity in special representatives and special envoys by 2015. At the current rate, the Secretariat, which manages the UN's peacekeeping and political missions, and is the largest entity of the UN system (employing one third of its overall professional workforce), is expected to **reach parity in 2038**, thirty-eight years behind the original goal to reach parity by 2000. Most notably, the Secretariat's gender balance is significantly worse than that of other large UN entities that deploy a significant number of field staff in many of the same locations, such as UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, UNFPA, and UNDP, and underperforms NATO, the World Bank, the European Commission, and IOM in the overall percentage of women. Even more worrisome, surveys reveal that **Secretariat staff in both field missions and HQ continue to place little value in gender balance in their workplace.**

There are almost **seven thousand international civilian staff in field missions, and less than 30 percent are women**. These low percentages, especially at the senior manager level, are **expected to get worse before they get better**, because of the higher **attrition** rate affecting women, the drawdown and closing of some of the missions with better gender balance, and the impending retirement of many P5 women.¹ The **biggest problems are identified at P5 to D2 levels** where the process is regulated by the staff selection system, where representation has barely increased since 2006, rather than the SG's appointment process, which has seen significant progress since then.²

¹ Additionally, budget reductions may affect women more negatively, since they are comparably more represented in temporary contracts and therefore more vulnerable to elimination.

² Fewer than 3 percent of heads of mission or deputy heads were female in 2007. On the other hand, there was 0.0 percent annual growth in P5 category from 2006 to 2012. The percentage of women at the D2 level was almost 27 percent in 2003, and exactly the same in 2013. Similarly low levels of annual growth have been registered at several other levels. Much faster change is possible. For example, UNAIDS launched its Gender Action Plan with an emphasis on accountability and career development,

The Department of Field Support has taken a number of **special measures** to address this imbalance, such as the requirement that at least one woman candidate be recommended to mission leadership per position, coaching and supporting candidates with competency-based training or reviewing their personal history profiles (PHPs), a more transparent roster-based recruitment process which requires vacancies filled from the roster to be advertised in Inspira to rostered candidates, and undertaking in-depth research on to the barriers that women face, including via civilian staff reviews in each mission and interviews with former women employees that have separated from the United Nations.

One of the main problems identified in surveys and assessments is that **the applicant pool is very small** (although those that applied were more in line with the requirements of the job). For field-level positions in peace operations, only 22 percent of external applicants and 28 percent of internal applicants were women. For D2s, only 9 percent of the applicant pool are women.

To strengthen and broaden the pool of applicants, the **Senior Women Talent Pipeline** was launched in 2014. A note verbale was sent to member states asking for nominations of women that could apply to D1 and D2 positions in Political Affairs, Rule of Law, Civil Affairs, and Public Information in field missions. 700 CVs were received, 64 women eligible for D1 and D2 posts were put on the roster, and 4 have already been selected for senior management jobs in field missions.

In addition, the introduction of the **UN System-Wide Accountability Plan** managed by UN Women and **HRM Scorecards**, a self-monitoring tool which requires missions to make a fifty-percent gain in their current performance gap towards parity, are seen as positive measures to hold managers accountable. These measures complement other existing temporary special measures –such as at least one woman in each three-member interview panel) as well as others agreed to by a Secretary-General **Policy Committee decision in July 2013 on the Status of Women in the Secretariat**, many of which have not yet been fully implemented. These include:

- Integrating gender targets as an indicator of **individual performance in all compacts with senior management**.
- Rostering candidates selected for position-specific openings.
- Issuing **periodic directives from the SG** to heads of departments reminding them of their gender targets and responsibilities.
- Making it easier for **UN volunteers** in field missions to apply for professional positions.
- Quarterly and annual updates and discussion in the Management Committee and Management Performance Board on the gender balance in all stages of the recruitment pipeline (application, screening, interviews, panel recommendation, and selection).
- Publicizing in iSeek the performance of each department on gender balance, devoting special articles to this issue.
- Making UN Women's new introductory **training** course on gender mandatory for all categories (as of recent surveys, only 7 out of 30 UN entities reported having mandatory gender training for all staff).
- Strengthening the **gender focal points system** (focal points should be P4 or above, but two-thirds report that they are P3 and below, and one-third are general service staff, with no terms of reference and virtually no time to devote to this function).

which resulted in an 8 percent increase in P5, and almost a 50 percent increase in women heads of country offices in only one year, from 2013 to 2014.

Other strategies suggested by various reports include:

- Actively **mentoring and grooming P2-P4 women**.
- **Targeted outreach for women candidates** (though the impact of outreach activities is very difficult to monitor and demonstrate, and the FPD unit in DFS only has budget for one staff dedicated to outreach half of their time and with no funds for activities).
- Allow for **current P5s to be directly eligible for D2 positions if they are eligible for D1 positions, and for D1s to be eligible to apply for ASG positions** – and thereby skipping a step in the bureaucratic ladder.
- As proposed by UNDP, introducing flexibility in the application of the time-in-post policy that allows women to apply for P4 and P5 positions after only two years in post.
- Opening **internal candidate pools for women nominees only** in severely under-performing departments.
- Reviewing the gender targets in the HRM scorecard every quarter at the senior level by the mission, as already done by UNAMID.
- Accelerate procedures to spot and on-board identified women for such positions.
- **Audit missions** who have remained stagnant or regressed, and institute a system of **sanctions and rewards** for performing and under-performing missions. **Hold leaders publicly accountable** for progress or lack of progress with regards to gender targets.
- Investing in making **mission life and spaces more friendly and safe for women**, and making the **contract benefits better known to potential women candidates**, as well as improving the optics of outreach and communications activities regarding life and work in peacekeeping missions.
- Changing the **policy on family and non-family duty stations** has not been considered or deemed feasible, and this is seen an impediment to women's representation given that **90 percent of missions are non-family duty stations**. However, the OHRM/DFS study revealed that a **significant proportion of the female workforce is single with no caregiving responsibilities** (OHRM/DFS study). Furthermore, the assumption that women are underrepresented in leadership roles because they prefer less demanding or time consuming positions to accommodate their families or lifestyle is challenged by the research. Many of the women that leave the organization may have partners but no children. Full consideration should be given to **adding a third category of duty stations that are conducive for couples without children**, or staff with healthy adult dependents.
- Finally, the gender gap is even worse among **national staff** (83 percent men vs 17 percent women), which are not affected by the policy on duty stations. Women's representation in national staff contracts should be facilitated by better **child care** policies and facilities and revising **experience requirements** in countries where women have limited education opportunities or access to the work force.