

thrive

WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY COP 26



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Current trends of women in diplomacy

Women in Politics

The “Women in Politics 2021” map, created by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU and UN Women), presents global rankings for women in executive, government and parliamentary positions as of 1 January 2021¹. The data reveals a record number of women heads of state or heads of government, as well as for the global share of women ministers. 5.9% of elected heads of state (9/152) and 6.7% of heads of government (13/193) are women. The region with the most countries led by women is Europe with 5/9 heads of state and 7/13 heads of government. Notably, the Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway are all currently led by women. The top three countries with 50% or more women ministers were: Nicaragua (58.82%); Austria (57.14%); Sweden (57.14%).

It is of note, however, that despite increases in the number of women at the highest levels of political power, widespread gender inequalities persist in politics. The rate of progression of women holding ministerial portfolios has slowed – a small increase from 21.3% in 2020 to 21.9% in 2021. Furthermore, the number of countries without any women as ministers increased from 9 to 12 in 2020, and only 25.5% of national parliamentarians are women, compared to 24.4% the year before.

The Women in Politics Map 2021 also reveals that the number of countries where there are no women in government has increased. IPU Secretary General Martin Chuongon criticised the findings, stating:

“This year’s growth in the number of women in political decision-making is just not good enough. Especially when you consider that 70% of health, care and service workers during this pandemic are women.”

The report also found that there were fewer gender equal governments and the number of countries in which women hold 50% or more ministerial positions dropped from 14 in 2020 to 13 in 2021.

The changes in women’s political participation varied across different regions of the world. Europe experienced the two greatest increases in women’s political representation at the executive level in 2021. In Lithuania, the share of women in government increased from 8% to 43% and in Belgium it increased from 25% to 57%.

¹ ‘Women in Politics’, UN Women, <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2021/women-in-politics-2021-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1305>

The greatest increase in Sub-Saharan Africa was in Namibia, where the overall proportion of women ministers went from 15% to 39%. Rwanda is still the regional leader and maintains 54.8% share of women ministers.

In the Americas, the newly appointed Biden administration has shown signs of being the most gender balanced in the country's history. Not only because of the election of the country's first female Vice President, but also due to the fact that women in charge of ministerial portfolios rose from 17% in 2020 to 46% in 2021. The regional and global lead however is Nicaragua with 58.82% of ministries being led by women.

In Asia, Mongolia has the biggest percentage increase in the region; going from 6.7% of women ministers in 2020 to 18.8% in 2021.

In the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA), Lebanon has the largest share of women ministers at 31.6%.

In the Pacific region, Kiribati gained one woman minister, and its parliament elected a woman speaker for the first time. New Zealand maintains the largest share of women ministers at 40%.

With regards to the portfolios held by women, the environment and energy portfolio was the number one spot of ministerial portfolios held by women².

Women and the Civil Service

In a Global Government Forum report,³ Canada was found to have the greatest proportion of women among its civil service leaders (48.1%). The top five countries included: Australia (46.3%), the UK (44.7%), South Africa (41.4%) and Brazil (39.4%). The five countries with the smallest proportion of women in senior roles were China (12.6%), Turkey (10.9%), South Korea (5.5%), Japan (4.9%) and Saudi Arabia (1.6%).

The report found that almost all G20, EU and OECD countries have been making progress in improving the representation of women in the highest ranks of the civil service.

Furthermore, the data suggests that in most nations civil service management ranks are closer to gender parity than legislative chambers, ministers and the boards of private sector companies.

² 'Press release: Women in politics: New data shows growth but also setbacks', UN Women, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2021/3/press-release-women-in-politics-new-data-shows-growth-but-also-setbacks>, published 10 March, 2021

³ 'Report', Global government forum, Women Leaders index, <https://www.womenleadersindex.com/report/>

Why is it important to have women at decision-making tables?

At 49.6% of the world's population, it is important to engage women in diplomacy to gain an accurate reflection of society. Increasing women's participation at decision-making tables also has a demonstrable, positive effect on political, social and economic outcomes. For example, the 6.4% of women CEOs of the US Fortune 500 list outperform organisations that do not have a high female representation board⁴. Additionally, women are regarded as reducing the chance of conflict during decision-making processes⁵. Despite this, the Council on Foreign Relations reports that between 1992 to 2019, women made up just 13% of negotiators, 6% of mediators and 6% of signatories in major peace processes worldwide⁶.

At decision-making tables senior figures grapple with a host of global issues, from climate change to world peace, of which accounts of women's lived experiences are a crucial prerequisite to effective conversations. It has been found that women are disproportionately affected by the negative impacts of climate change when compared to men. For example, a ChristianAid report found that climate-related migration in the Dry Corridor of Central America has increased women's burdens to travel longer distances to get water and to spend more time caring for those with ill health⁷. Despite parallels between gender equality and climate change, a UN 2020 report found that only 17 countries' national action plans mentioned climate change, and that gender equality was largely missing from policy debates⁸. Considering the scale of environmental issues, it is dangerous to further minuscule women and their expertise from strategic plans, given their unique experience.

The absence of female perspectives is the absence of a balanced perspective. The UK recognised the importance of gender inclusivity in its support of the Gender Action Plan during COP25. Strengthening the voices of women delivers stronger results in implementation and, by involving those affected by decisions, has been shown to increase public support for policy⁹. Women's representation has also promoted lateral thinking at

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<https://www.naturalhr.com/2021/03/23/10-reasons-why-the-world-needs-more-women-in-leadership-roles/>

⁵ 'Report', Global government forum, Women Leaders index, <https://www.womenleadersindex.com/report/>

⁶ <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/>

⁷ <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/resources/about-us/climate-migration-dry-corridor-central-america>

⁸ <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/946>

⁹ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.3763/cpol.2009.0673>

decision-making tables¹⁰. Ensuring women are included in negotiations invites a plethora of skills, socioeconomic perspectives, gender experiences and cultural views that are more likely to result in effective, well-represented and comprehensive solutions¹¹. When decisions affect a certain group or society as a whole it is important for policies to be deliberated, upheld, and implemented by a reflection of those groups. Thus, calling for gender equality in leadership roles is inherently important.

What goes wrong when there is not a gender balance?

Failure to achieve gender balance has adverse impacts across all areas of society. For example, gender inequalities in healthcare prevail because of gender imbalance in medical research and the exclusion of women from clinical trials, largely due to concerns including hormonal fluctuations during the menstrual cycle, fertility and the impact of contraceptives.¹² Low representation of women in tech (around 17 percent)¹³ was found to influence subtle gender bias in algorithms that determine the circulation of online content. The 2019 study found that a gender-neutral ad with the headline 'Information about STEM careers' was considerably less likely to be advertised to women in comparison to men, whilst ads for household goods were more likely to be targeted towards women.¹⁴

Gender imbalance across all sectors reinforces deep-rooted structural bias and creates barriers to achieving meaningful change – the consequences of which are no different within politics and diplomacy. For example, in half of the countries in Asia, less than 10 percent of seats in national parliaments are occupied by women.¹⁵ As a result, issues relating to the

¹⁰ <https://www.climateandcapitalmedia.com/ahead-of-cop26-activists-ask-where-are-the-women/>

¹¹ n2

¹² Elisa Chilet-Rosell (2014) Gender bias in clinical research, pharmaceutical marketing, and the prescription of drugs, *Global Health Action*, 7:1, DOI: 10.3402/gha.v7.25484

¹³ Jenny Little (2 Jan 2020) "Ten Years on, why are there still so few women in tech" *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/careers/2020/jan/02/ten-years-on-why-are-there-still-so-few-women-in-tech>>

¹⁴ Lambrecht, A., & Tucker, C. (2019). Algorithmic bias? An empirical study of apparent gender-based discrimination in the display of STEM career ads. *Management Science*, 65(7), 2966-2981. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2018.3093>

¹⁵ ADB (2010), *Key Indicators for Asia and the Pacific 2010*, Manila: Author. Beteta, Cueva Hanny (2006), "What Is Missing in Measures of Women's Empowerment?" *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 7(2): 221-241.

progress of gender equality and women's empowerment in the region is limited¹⁶ as these issues are considered less pertinent to national interests. The lack of women representatives encourages gender bias¹⁷ in policies and suggests "men's interests are the only ones that exist".¹⁸

Gender imbalance in climate change negotiations can have serious implications for those most vulnerable to climate-related disasters. It is widely acknowledged by NGOs and intergovernmental institutions that existing inequalities create variation in vulnerability to climate change and can hinder individuals' adaptability to climate-related disasters,¹⁹ leaving many women in the Global South particularly vulnerable.²⁰ The Human Development Report 2020²¹ details how, in some communities, women's movements are restricted without a male chaperone. If displaced, this may mean women are unable to seek safety and shelter if it requires cohabiting with an unknown man. Similarly, reduced access to finances can limit women's ability to respond to the impacts of climate change.²² There are also risks to men's safety by failing to engage meaningfully with gender at climate negotiations. Research in Nicaragua found that male widowers experienced heightened vulnerability to water scarcity because environmental policy-makers had positioned water collection, and its scarcity, as an issue that pertains to women.²³

At climate change negotiations, the absence of women representatives in decision-making processes equates to an absence of perspectives that reflect the nuance and variation in gendered experiences of climate change. The UNFCCC recognises that women bear the greater burden and risks from the effects of climate change, and yet women's contributions

¹⁶ Jae Kyung Lee & Hye-Gyong Park (2011) Measures of Women's Status and Gender Inequality in Asia: Issues and Challenges, *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 17:2, 7-31, DOI: 10.1080/12259276.2011.11666106

¹⁷ Pat O'Connor (2019) Gender imbalance in senior positions in higher education: what is the problem? What can be done?, *Policy Reviews in Higher Education*, 3:1, 28-50, DOI: 10.1080/23322969.2018.1552084

¹⁸ Pringle, R., and S. Watson. 1990. "Fathers, Brothers, Mates: The Fraternal State in Australia." In *Playing the State: Australian Feminist Interventions*, edited by S. Watson, 229–243. London: Verso.

¹⁹ Morrow, K. 2017. Changing The Climate of Participation: The gender constituency in the global climate change regime. In: S. MacGregor, ed. *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Environment*. Taylor and Francis, pp. 398-411

²⁰ "Gender & Climate Change: an important connection" (UNFCCC) <<https://unfccc.int/gender>>

²¹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2020. *The 2020 Human Development Report*. New York: UNDP.

²² Sasvari, A.A., 2010. Changes in Climate Negotiations: Gender Equality Towards Copenhagen. *Global Social Policy*, 10(1), pp.15-18.

²³ Lau, J.D., Kleiber, D., Lawless, S. And Cohen, P.J., 2021. Gender equality in climate policy and practice hindered by assumptions. *Nature Climate Change*, 11, pp.186-192.

to climate change policies and implementation has been limited as a result of their “unequal participation in the decision-making process”.²⁴ This creates a trickle-down effect that is detrimental to the safety and wellbeing of the communities that policies seek to protect.

Gender balance vs. Gender inclusivity

The equal participation of women and men in politics is an important condition for effective democracy and good governance. Nevertheless, political assemblies and executives are often unrepresentative of the gender diversity of the wider population. The participation of more women in political decision-making not only enhances the democratic system but can also lead to many positive effects on society that benefits both men and women. Benefits include equitable societies and inclusive governance²⁵.

Gender balance refers to a situation where both men and women have equal representation, opportunities and access to matters in all the institutions of society such as education, the economy and politics²⁶. **Gender inclusion** is the notion that all services, opportunities and establishments are open to all people and that male and female stereotypes do not define societal roles and expectations. The discrepancy in workplace wages, with men typically earning more than women, is one of the biggest indicators that a lack of gender inclusion still exists²⁷. These terms are not mutually exclusive, but rather have a symbiotic relationship. In the sense that if gender inclusivity is successful in a given setting, it should then go on to fuel the gender balance. Nevertheless, whilst gender balance ensures equal representation, for example by fulfilling quotas of women at the talks, it does not guarantee gender inclusion relating to meaningful participation, for example having women in senior roles, women speakers at the talks, or that women’s contributions are given equal rating. Therefore, with regards to furthering the position of women and ensuring the multiplicity of voices that are privileged, gender inclusivity goes further as it empowers women.

²⁴ “Gender & Climate Change: an important connection” (UNFCCC) <<https://unfccc.int/gender>>

²⁵ European institute for Gender Equality (14 July 2020)

<https://eige.europa.eu/publications/statistical-brief-gender-balance-politics>

²⁶ Babatunde Joshua Omotosho (2013) Gender Balance. In: Idowu S.O., Capaldi N., Zu L., Gupta A.D. (eds) Encyclopedia of Corporate Social Responsibility. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-28036-8_624

²⁷ Merryville University “Definitive Guide to All - Gender Inclusion”<https://online.maryville.edu/online-bachelors-degrees/liberal-studies/guide-to-gender-inclusion>

International organisations and businesses alike have made attempts to promote a better gender balance within their institutions. For example, the launch of the Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG) in 2014 at COP20 encouraged parties to promote gender balance via the introduction of the Gender Action Plan. Under this plan, gender balance, participation and women's leadership would be achieved through the promotion of travel funds and developing, promoting and conducting training on leadership, negotiation and chairing to achieve and sustain full, equal and meaningful participation and representation of women in the UNFCCC process. Similarly, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development has identified economic inclusion gaps²⁸.

Gender inclusion must go beyond diversity – in this case, having more women in the workplace or in political settings. Simply raising the number of people from underrepresented groups – women in this instance – does not guarantee that they will work in an environment of equal opportunity. Furthermore, there must be a gender balance in such settings to facilitate gender inclusivity, as men are unlikely to advocate for the needs of women as effectively as women. In an article in the Harvard Business Review, Roy, Smith and Johnson assert that to make progress toward gender equity, men need to be involved²⁹. Nevertheless, zero-sum bias often deters men from engaging in the conversation because it fuels the belief that men must sacrifice either their resources or stature for women to earn a seat at the table. This form of thinking is pervasive in workplace equity narratives despite being invalidated by available data³⁰.

Moreover, for women to be able to fully exercise their human rights, gender perspectives must be mainstreamed. For example, international migration often brings to the fore the various ways that gender can lead to different outcomes for men and women. As such, a way forward could be to scrutinise programs and policies through a gendered lens, thereby challenging discrimination and implementing and promoting gender equal measures through gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming is the deliberate consideration of gender in all stages of program and policy planning, implementation and evaluation. This is done with a view to incorporate the impacts of gender at all levels of decision-making.

²⁸ Partha Garkoti, (16 November 2020)“The COP26 Paradox: Where are the Women?” , The IWI: International Women’s Initiative <https://www.theiwi.org/gpr-reports/the-cop26-paradox-where-are-the-women>

²⁹ Katica Roy, David G.Smith and W. Brad Johnson (31 December 2020) “Gender Equity is not zero sum” Harvard Business Review <https://hbr.org/2020/12/gender-equity-is-not-zero-sum>

³⁰ Christina Pavlou “Gender inclusion in the workplace: going beyond diversity” (2020) Workable <https://resources.workable.com/stories-and-insights/gender-inclusion-in-the-workplace>

Focus on COP26: What is gender inclusivity going to be like at the talks?

Originally scheduled for November 2020 and delayed by a year due to the Covid-19 global pandemic, COP26 has been hailed as the 'world's best last chance to get runaway climate change under control'³¹. With 190 world leaders and 12 days of talks, the event is presented as vital and urgent. Evidently, the future of the planet has huge consequences and affects both genders, however research suggests that women suffer more from the negative effects of environmental change³².

Consequently, it was a disappointment and contrary to good sense to many that the UK planned to host the summit represented by an all-male team of senior politicians, civil servants and negotiators³³. Such a blatant lack of gender balance in the team frustrated the promise for progress and rejected the importance of gender inclusivity. There were women representatives at a more junior level, however the reluctance to empower women to share their voices at the forefront of the conversation foreshadowed a failure to truly consider women's perspectives. In short, in September 2020, the prospect of effective gender inclusivity at the talks seemed far-fetched.

Fortunately, the lack of inclusion and diversity in the UK team was heavily criticised. Four hundred women signed an open letter calling for the UK government to invite more women to partake in 'decision-making roles'³⁴. It followed that Conservative MP Anne-Marie Trevelyan was appointed to the COP26 leadership team³⁵. To what extent this may shift the talks towards inclusivity is uncertain. The recent past could offer insight as to what approach may be taken with regards to gender inclusivity. According to the UN in 2019 at the COP25

³¹ 'What is a COP?', UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) at the SEC – Glasgow 2021, accessed 08 June, 2021, published 25 May, 2021, <https://ukcop26.org/uk-presidency/what-is-a-cop/>

³² 'Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change' UN WomenWatch, accessed 08 June, 2021, https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/downloads/Women_and_Climate_Change_Factsheet.pdf

³³ Fiona Harvey, 'UK plan to use all-male team to host UN climate summit angers observers', 21 September, 2020, 11.08 BST, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/sep/21/uk-plan-all-male-team-host-cop26-un-climate-summit-angers-activists>

³⁴ 'SHE Changes Climate Open Letter', SHE Changes Climate, accessed 08 June, 2021, <https://www.shechangesclimate.org/open-letter>

³⁵ 'UK appoints champion to support developing countries to deal with climate change', GOV.UK, accessed 08 June, 2021, published 07 November, 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-appoints-champion-to-support-developing-countries-to-deal-with-climate-change>

climate change conference, 21% of the 196 heads of delegation were women³⁶. Notably, the 16-year-old Greta Thunberg made waves, fresh from her transatlantic voyage she took to the stage to speak before the UN assembly and shortly after received the title of Time Magazine's 'Person of the Year'. Thunberg, a young woman, was being listened to. Furthermore, COP25 saw a commitment to a five-year gender action plan to advance women's 'full, equal and meaningful participation and... promote gender-responsive...climate policy' and the mainstreaming of a gender perspective³⁷. The plan expressly recognises the challenges faced by Indigenous People and was broadly welcomed as paving a road to a crucial, gender inclusive approach to climate adaptation.

It is a disheartening reality that the resolutions made during the previous COP were seemingly disregarded by the host country in the preparation for COP26. When it comes to gender inclusivity, past endeavours may have been well-intentioned yet have proven inadequate, and present efforts appear ill-considered and perhaps reluctant. At the upcoming COP26, due to the interrelationship between gender and climate, the need for gender inclusivity is, like positive environmental change, essential. What gender inclusivity may look like is uncertain, but it is pivotal.

Recommendations for COP26

It is recommended that the COP26 conference should identify the significant role that gender inclusivity can play in achieving the four core goals³⁸.

The summit aims to 'secure global net zero by mid-century and keep 1.5 degrees within reach'. Countries are asked to make ambitious emissions reductions targets to deliver positive results. The promotion of girls' access to education can contribute to this goal. Through education girls gain more knowledge in preparation to deal with the agricultural and general effects of climate change (such as extreme weather, natural disasters etc.)³⁹. Additionally, education for girls would promote their reproductive health rights and can result

³⁶ 'COP26: Ellie Goulding and Emma Watson join call for climate talks change', BBC News, accessed 08 June, 2021, published 10 December, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-55254771>

³⁷ 'Report of the Conference of the Parties on its twenty-fifth session, held in Madrid from 2 to 15 December 2019', UNFCCC, accessed 08 June, 2021, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cop2019_13a01E.pdf

³⁸ <https://ukcop26.org/cop26-goals/>

³⁹ Project Drawdown "Health and Education" <<https://drawdown.org/solutions/health-and-education>>

in a slower population growth, consequently reducing CO2 emissions⁴⁰. Education promotes their empowerment, allowing them to lead more financially independent lives (e.g., allow access to loan, land ownership) and enable more women to occupy political office⁴¹ and have female representation to voice decisions. A study found that countries with females in high political status have lower emissions of CO2 per capita⁴². This demonstrates that the path to positive climate change and gender equality are inextricably linked.

The drive to adapt to protect communities and natural habitats is a goal that necessitates support from women. Women's voices should be heard as it is a fact that women are more vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change than their male counterparts; they are more likely to be displaced from their homes or to die as a result of a climate disaster or pollution⁴³. Yet women should not be viewed solely as victims, but also as vehicles for change. In many global cultures, women are intricately linked with their communities and therefore are well-placed to contribute to finding workable solutions to avoid the devastating effects of climate change. Furthermore, women are often uniquely placed to work within communities to promote understanding and cooperation⁴⁴.

It is understood that climate finance must be mobilised to deliver COP26's goals. The recent paper 'Women's Economic Empowerment and Climate Change: A Primer'⁴⁵ emphasises the importance of recognising the intersection between women's economic empowerment and climate change. COP26 should engage with female voices to explore how women can offer valuable commercial insight and opportunities for investment across different sectors⁴⁶. Women make 80% of global household buying decisions⁴⁷, therefore companies that understand women's needs may establish a larger market share. Furthermore, according to

⁴⁰ Earthday.org "Climate Action: Women's Empowerment is Key to Reducing Climate Change" (6 Mar 2020) <<https://www.earthday.org/womens-empowerment-is-key-to-reducing-climate-change/>>

⁴¹ Earthday.org "Climate Action: Women's Empowerment is Key to Reducing Climate Change" (6 Mar 2020) <<https://www.earthday.org/womens-empowerment-is-key-to-reducing-climate-change/>>

⁴² Ergas, Christina & York, Richard. (2012). "Women's Status and Carbon Dioxide Emissions: A Quantitative Cross-national Analysis" Social science research. 41. 965-76. 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2012.03.008.

⁴³ 'Climate change and gender', ActionAid, <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/our-work/emergencies-disasters-humanitarian-response/climate-change-and-gender>

⁴⁴ 'Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change', UN WomenWatch, https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/downloads/Women_and_Climate_Change_Factsheet.pdf

⁴⁵ 'Women's Economic Empowerment and Climate Change: A Primer', The Work and Opportunities for Women programme, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/980912/Guidance3-WEE-Climate-Change-Primer.pdf

⁴⁶ 'Gender & Climate Investment: A strategy for unlocking a sustainable future', Gender Smart, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5af586a9a9e0287427653654/t/601ae6fe2f333d2a1fb598aa/1612375826979/Gender%26ClimateInvestment-GenderSmartReport-Feb21.pdf>

⁴⁷ <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/ru/Documents/public-sector/gender-dividend-en.pdf>

the International Monetary Fund, increasing women's labour force participation to equal country-specific male levels would raise GDP in the United States by 5%, Japan by 9%, UAE by 12% and in Egypt by 34%⁴⁸. Such statistics evidence the untapped potential in women that may be used in support of climate finance.

The conference aims to promote collaboration, recognising that 'we can only rise to the challenges of the climate crisis by working together'. A gender inclusive approach to tackling the challenges of the climate crisis would ensure the inclusion of the voices of both men and women and thereby support this goal. For too long the needs of half of the global population have been given primacy and, to ensure the collective future of all, the voices of women must be considered. We must work together to tackle the existential crisis that we are faced with. Such an approach would allow for a total assessment of the disparate needs of all. We would therefore advocate a collaborative and diverse model that considers the voices of women from across the leadership and age spectrum. Furthermore, in the finalising of instruments such as the Paris Rulebook the voices of women from the global south should be given the same value as the needs of women from more economically advanced countries.

Afterword

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⁴⁸ 'Gender and climate change', IUCN, <https://www.iucn.org/resources/issues-briefs/gender-and-climate-change>