

GENDER EQUALITY IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: WHERE ARE THE WOMEN IN ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE MINISTRIES?



University of
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POLICY BRIEF

United Nations Development Programme



Gender equality in public administration is a key step towards achieving women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life. Women's participation and leadership is necessary to building diverse, representative and effective public institutions and policies.¹

The stakes for gender equality are particularly high in environmental and climate change policy domains. On the one hand, gendered drivers and impacts of environmental degradation and climate change continue to expand existing gender inequalities and create new ones. In many parts of the world, women depend on and have unequal access to land, water, and other natural resources, as well as related public services and infrastructure, including energy, transport, water, and sanitation. This leads women to be disproportionately affected by climate change, environmental degradation and disasters, while having limited power and influence over decision-making in these spheres.²

On the other hand, a growing body of evidence already shows that women's participation and leadership in environmental and climate governance enhances the quality of decision-making, the effectiveness of conservation policies, strategies and initiatives, and produces a more equitable distribution of benefits.³ Furthermore, women's environmental stewardship and leadership are the foundation of many effective, efficient, equitable and sustainable climate and environmental solutions. Integrating gender equality and environmental considerations into policy decisions can accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Agenda.⁴ A key part of this is accounting for the specific needs, preferences and well-being of women and ensuring their involvement in decision-making.⁵

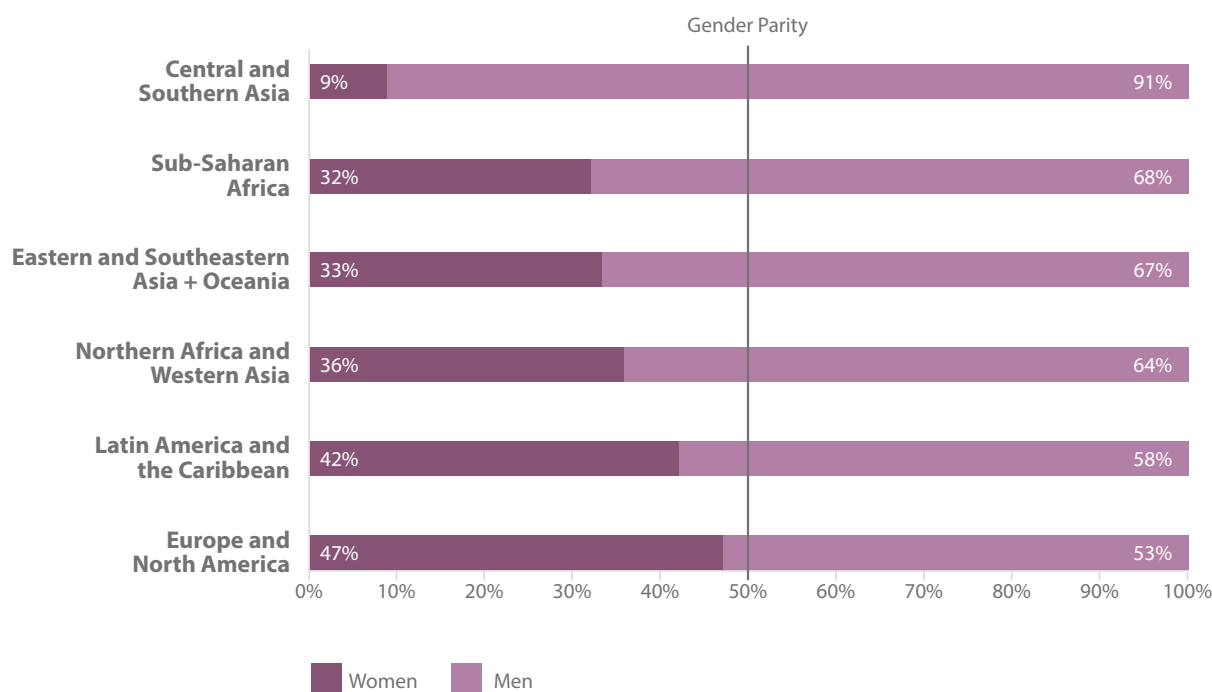
To assess gender equality in environmental and climate change governance, this brief first looks at women's participation in and leadership of environmental protection ministries, a locus of policymaking and implementation of environmental and climate agendas.⁶ Second, this brief widens the view to include climate change machinery, all ministries tasked officially with each country's response to climate change.⁷ The data reveal that, while progress in women's participation in public administration across many other sectors has improved, altogether holding 46 percent of positions as public administrators around the globe, significant gaps remain – with the largest ones affecting environment and climate spheres.

Women's and men's participation in environmental ministries, by region

In most regions of the world, women are underrepresented in environmental protection ministries (Figure 1). In fact, women's participation in environmental protection ministries averages 33 percent globally – among the lowest of all policy areas. Looking across regions, women's participation only approaches parity in Europe and North America, while in Central and Southern Asia, environmental protection ministries are almost exclusively staffed by men, averaging less than 10 percent of women employees in the region.⁸



FIGURE 1
Percentages of women and men employees in environmental protection ministries by region



Source: Gender Parity in Civil Service (Gen-PaCS) dataset, December 2020.

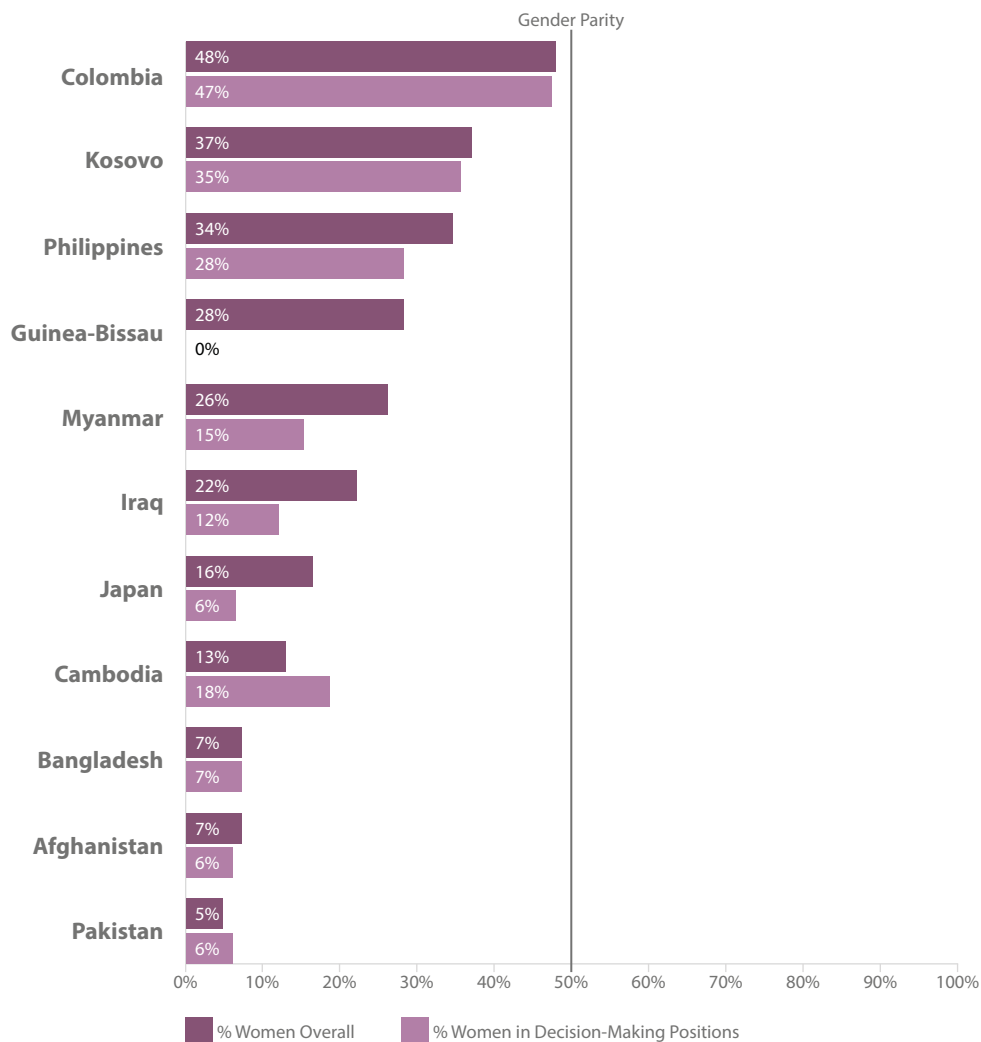
Women employees and decision makers in environmental protection ministries

Available data in the 2021 Gender Equality in Public Administration (GEPA) global report show that gender parity in environmental protection ministries is rare, both in overall participation and decision-making levels (Figure 2). Colombia is an exception, with women holding nearly half of the positions across all levels. The degree of women’s exclusion elsewhere is striking. In Cambodia, women make up just 13 percent of civil servants in the Ministry of Environment, which is the lowest share of women across Cambodia’s public administration. Similarly, women only account for 18 percent of the same ministry’s decision-makers.

In Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Guinea-Bissau, Japan, and Pakistan, women hold less than 10 percent of decision-making positions in environmental protection ministries. Available data also show little evidence of improvement over time.⁹ In Bangladesh, for example, women’s share of decision-making positions in the Ministry of Environment and Forests was 7 percent both in 2013 and 2017. However, one country showing some progress on this front is Kazakhstan, where women’s share of decision-making positions in the Ministry of Environment and Water Resources increased from 7 percent in 2013 to 16 percent in 2019.¹⁰



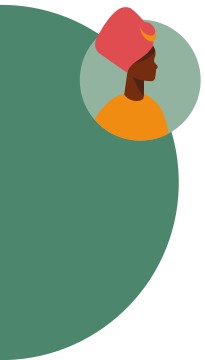
FIGURE 2
Percentage of women in public administration and decision-making in environmental protection ministries



Note: The figure includes 11 countries and territories with data on women's participation and decision-making positions in environmental protection ministries. Data prior to 2015 are excluded. Varied levels of decision-making are reported.
Source: Gender Parity in Civil Service (Gen-PaCS) dataset, December 2020.

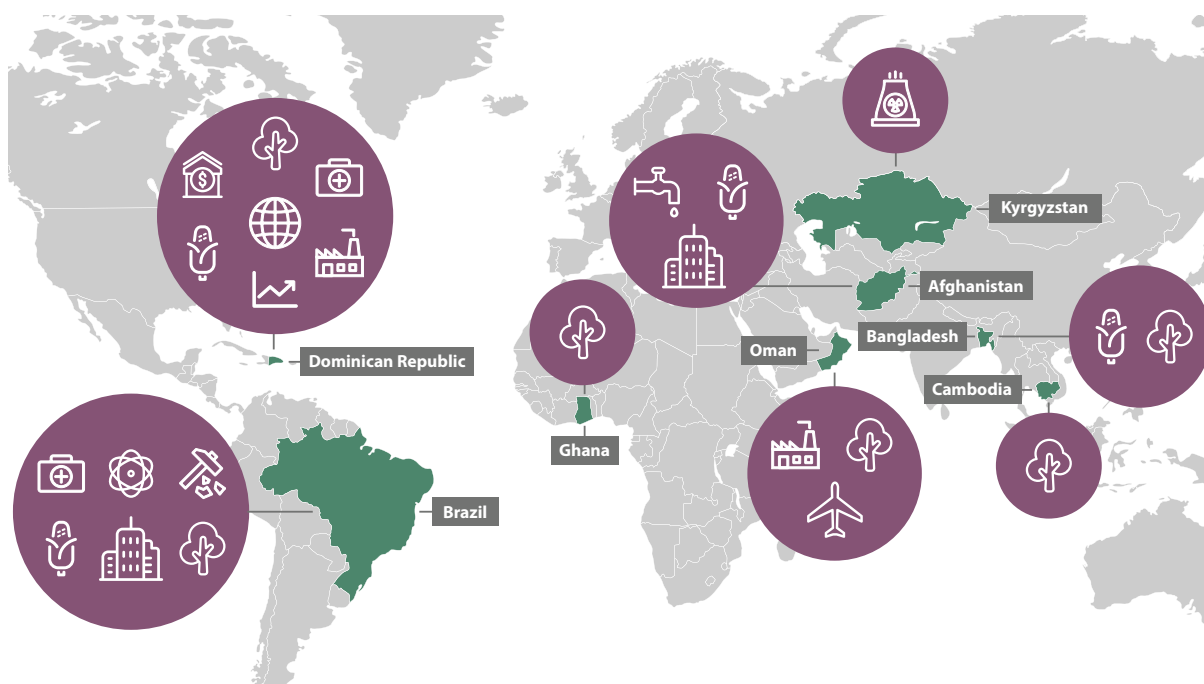
Women's participation in climate change machineries and comparison to other ministries

Mitigating climate change and adapting to its multisectoral effects requires participation from multiple policy domains, starting with environmental protection ministries but also including agriculture, commerce and industry, finance, foreign affairs, health, natural resources, planning, public works, regional development, science and technology, and more. Ministries tasked with climate change vary widely from one country to the next (Figure 3). Climate change machinery may be wide-reaching, as is the case in the Dominican Republic where



seven ministries are formally tasked with climate change, or may be limited, as is the case in Kyrgyzstan, where climate change is tasked solely to the Ministry of Emergency Situations. Women's involvement in each of these cases differs.

FIGURE 3
Types of ministries tasked with climate change policy



Source: Presentation of the Gender Equality in Public Administration (GEPA) Working Group, University of Pittsburgh, Fall 2019.

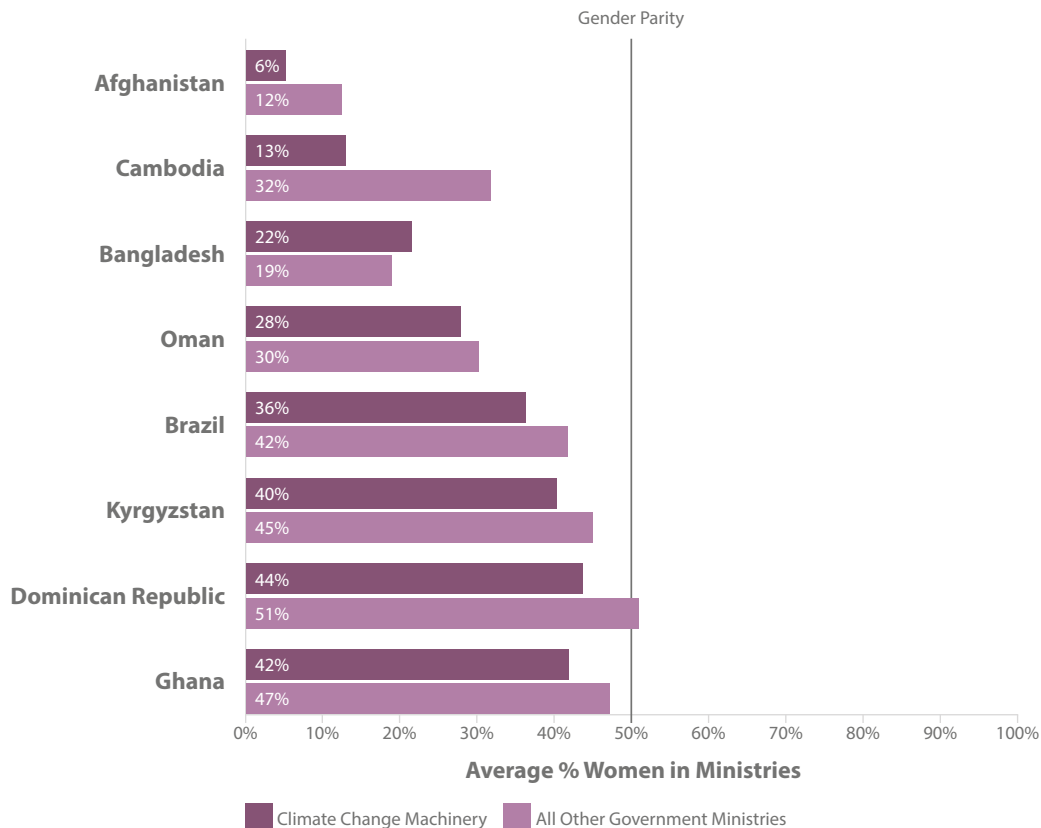
<https://www.girl.pitt.edu/research/presentations>

Note: Ministry names and categories for each country appear in the Appendix.

Women's participation in ministries tasked with climate change is often lower than their levels of participation in other government ministries (Figure 4). In an analysis of eight countries with available data on women's participation in ministries tasked with climate change, the largest gap is in Cambodia, where women average just 13 percent of employees in climate change ministries, compared to 32 percent in all other government ministries. Also notable is that women's participation is at parity in Ghana, Dominican Republic, and Kyrgyzstan in ministries that are not tasked with climate change (45-51 percent women) but is less in ministries tasked with climate change (40-44 percent). One exception to the general pattern is in Bangladesh, where women average 22 percent in the Ministries of Agriculture, Disaster Management and Relief, and Environment and Forest, but average an even lower share of positions (19 percent) in ministries not tasked with climate change.



FIGURE 4
Women’s participation in ministries tasked with climate change compared to all other government ministries



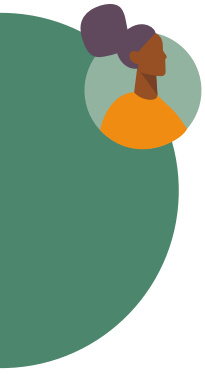
Note: The figure includes eight countries and territories with data on women’s participation in ministries tasked with climate change. Data prior to 2015 are excluded.

Source: Gender Parity in Civil Service (Gen-PaCS) dataset, December 2020.

Promoting gender equality in environmental protection ministries and climate change machineries

Establishing gender equality in participation and leadership across environmental ministries and climate change machineries is a high return opportunity. First, mainstreaming women’s participation across ministries in charge of climate change policy and at all levels of decision-making encourages the breakdown of existing glass walls and ceilings within public administration, making it more inclusive across different policy domains. Second, diverse climate change policymaking promises more efficient, effective and sustainable climate change policy outcomes for all.¹¹

To expedite women’s increased contributions to climate change policymaking and implementation, UNDP develops and supports a range of initiatives. In Iraq, together with the Ministry of Health and Environment, UNDP launched the Women for Safe and Green Iraq (WfSGI) platform to create opportunities for women to continue professional development and provide entry points for innovative solutions for an environment-friendly and resilient country. In Chile, UNDP provided support to the Ministry of the Environment to integrate gender into its participatory



processes and consultations through the creation of the Climate Change and Gender Working Group. As part of UNDP's Gender Equality Seal for Public Institutions pilot initiative, in El Salvador the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) established a gender budget line and Gender Unit, as well as strategic alliances for gender equality with the Salvadoran Institute for the Development of Women (ISDEMU) and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID). Within the same pilot Gender Seal initiative, the Ministry of Energy and Mines in Benin designed an action plan to integrate gender into policies of energy access, complemented by a newly approved national framework for gender and social inclusion in the energy sector.

Recommendations

Like the 2021 GEPA report, this brief aims to catalyse policy and programming to accelerate women's equal participation and leadership in public administration, with a specific focus on environment and climate change machineries. It recognises the range of challenges to improving gender equality in public administration – from women's persistent under-representation in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields, for example, to harmful gendered social norms that tend to minimize or overlook women's diverse contributions to environment and climate action. It also highlights opportunities and the range of important steps that can be taken by numerous target actors to improve gender equality in environment and climate change machineries within public administrations.

As the GEPA report outlines key areas for action, including promoting positive synergies with the broader gender equality agenda and strengthening constitutional, legislative and policy frameworks; strengthening data availability to track progress on women's participation and decision-making in public service; supporting institutional change within public administrations; and leveraging partnerships for change, recommendations to strengthen gender equality in environmental and climate public administration include the following:

Promote positive synergies between gender equality in public administration of climate machineries with the broader gender equality agenda

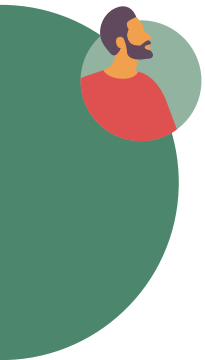
- Develop national environment and climate gender equality plans with concrete mechanisms for implementation and accountability, including for public administration. These should be aligned to international frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action, which call on governments to commit to gender balance in public administration to advance women's full participation in public life and decision-making. Ensure adherence to the gender mandates in the main Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs),¹² including the UNFCCC Lima Work Programme and its Action Plan on gender guidance on women's participation.¹³
- Strengthen constitutional, legislative, and policy frameworks and develop gender equality laws to uphold gender equality as a national priority across sectors, and mainstream gender equality throughout legislation. For example, consider quotas across public bodies and temporary special measures (TSMs), including targeted recruitment in hiring and promotion.



- Pursue policies, programmes, and practices that challenge and aim to overcome inequitable social norms affecting environmental and climate decision-making, for example related to women's disproportionate and undervalued unpaid care work, which requires long-term and holistic efforts.¹⁴
- Support women's education and preparedness for civil service and technical environmental careers, with a focus on correcting young women's underrepresentation in STEM fields.¹⁵
- Expand the evidence-based research related to women's contributions to climate action and environmental protection, developing data-based connections between gender equality in public administration, inclusive institutions and quality public policy outcomes for all.
- Ensure gender-disaggregated data in public administration is consistently collected, analysed, and applied to inform effective decision-making across sectors. Countries are encouraged to invest in their national statistical systems and collect gender-disaggregated data across all sectors and levels of decision-making. Efforts to collect better and more accessible data on the environmental sector should also include gender-disaggregated data in public institutions tasked with combating climate change.

Create institutional change within public administration

- Reform workplace culture, penalise sexism and harassment at work, and promote work-life balance. This is particularly important in institutions such as environment and climate change, where harmful gendered social norms have tended to minimize or overlook diverse women's contributions to environment and climate action. Creative solutions for positions that require field work, for example, can better accommodate parental and other care responsibilities through flexible work arrangements.
- Adjust infrastructure of environmental institutions that have field offices and stations to the needs of diverse women and create a safe environment for them.
- Implement inclusive and transparent human resources policies. These include gender-responsive recruitment and selection procedures, such as gender-balanced recruitment and promotions panels.
- Break down glass walls to ensure women's participation at all levels of decision-making across different ministries, especially where tackling complex policy challenges such as the nature-climate crisis requires the engagement of a diverse set of capacities and decision-making bodies.
- Build capacity of civil servants on gender equality and gender integration in environment and climate change policies and programmes, including through systematic training of civil servants to ensure ownership and sustainability of programs that promote gender equality, noting that changing attitudes and culture is one of the biggest challenges.¹⁶
- Work to transform the organizational cultures of public institutions through the UNDP Gender Equality Seal certification for ministries of environment and climate change. This global initiative supports and recognizes the efforts made by public institutions to achieve substantive gender equality and accelerate the achieve-



ment of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. It incentivizes public institutions to meet rigorous standards through an action plan for improvement relating to public policies, programmes and budgets, leadership and enabling work environments.¹⁷

Build strong global, regional, and national partnerships for organizational change

- Improve coordination among UN entities and partners, as multilateralism is key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, environmental mandates and climate action, including the commitments made under the Paris Agreement. The Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) – the mechanisms at the heart of the Paris Agreement that countries develop primarily to reduce greenhouse gas emissions – show that progress towards more gender-responsive climate action is possible. Similarly the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) can put key actions in place to improve the diversity of women’s participation and representation. 96 percent of Climate Promise countries that submitted new or updated NDCs have included references to women’s empowerment and/or gender equality, evidence that NDCs are adopting more inclusive approaches and, as a result, reflecting the priorities of a broader scope of society, particularly in addressing gender equality.¹⁸
- Ensure the NDCs continue to support countries to improve the integration of gender, poverty and climate change within their national public sector climate financing systems, as well as improve capacity-building for gender mainstreaming across climate and environment ministries.
- Strengthen gender-responsive policies, accountability mechanisms, and strengthen institutional mechanisms for gender-responsive climate actions. Ensure that the key structures of compliance of countries’ climate commitments, Measurement, Reporting and Verification (MRV) systems, monitor i) the advancement of gender commitments, and ii) gender differentiated impacts of climate actions.
- Collect and disseminate good practices on gender mainstreaming across climate and environment ministries, including specifically enabling conditions for women’s participation and leadership.
- Support non-governmental organizations and women’s movements to engage in and shape environment and climate administration, and challenge together discriminatory social norms that hold gender inequality intact.
- Work in partnership to increase women’s leadership and decision-making in green recovery and climate negotiations. For example, UNDP’s partnership with UN Women and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) integrated a green lens in the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker to identify policies taken by national governments that promote gender-responsive and climate-friendly COVID-19 recovery policies.¹⁹

Taken together, these recommendations can improve the rate of women’s participation in public administration, break down glass walls of the climate machinery and lead to better and more inclusive governance.



Appendix

Ministries Tasked with Climate Change by Country

Note: How ministries are categorized in Figure 3 appears in parentheses after the ministry name.

Afghanistan	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (Agriculture) Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (Regional / Rural Development) Ministry of Water and Power (Water)
Bangladesh	Ministry of Agriculture (Agriculture) Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (Emergency) Ministry of Environment and Forest (Environment / Climate Affairs)
Brazil	Ministry of Environment (Environment / Climate Affairs) Ministry of Health (Health) Ministry of Livestock Agriculture and Supply (Agriculture) Ministry of Mines and Energy (Mining) Ministry of Regional Development (Regional / Rural Development) Ministry of Science, Technology, Innovation and Communications (Science)
Cambodia	Ministry of Environment (Environment / Climate Affairs)
Dominican Republic	Ministry of Agriculture (Agriculture) Ministry of Economy, Planning and Development (Finance) Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (Environment / Climate Affairs) Ministry of External Relations (Foreign Relations) Ministry of Industry and Commerce (Commerce and Industry) Ministry of Public Health (Health) Ministry of Treasury (Treasury)
Ghana	Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovations (Environment / Climate Affairs)
Kyrgyzstan	Ministry of Emergency Situations (Emergency)
Oman	Ministry of Commerce and Industry (Commerce and Industry) Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs (Environment / Climate Affairs) Ministry of Tourism (Tourism)

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Endnotes

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- 6 This brief summarizes key sector-specific data published in Finkel, Müge Kökten, Melanie M. Hughes, and Joanna Hill. Gender Equality in Public Administration. New York, NY: UNDP and University of Pittsburgh. <https://www.undp.org/publications/global-report-gender-equality-public-administration>. The report is the first comprehensive in-depth research into gender equality in public administration across sectors in 170 countries. The report finds that though there has been progress on women's representation overall in public administration, persistent gaps remain. Women continue to hit a glass ceiling and glass walls that stop them from advancing to positions at the highest levels of power and influence, including in the COVID-19 response.
- 7 Climate change machinery includes ministries that by mandate and/or by budget play a role in the making or implementation of national climate change policies.
- 8 Finkel, Müge Kökten, Melanie M. Hughes, and Joanna Hill. Gender Equality in Public Administration. New York, NY: UNDP and University of Pittsburgh. <https://www.undp.org/publications/global-report-gender-equality-public-administration>
- 9 For example, IUCN's 2021 data on women environmental ministers showed slow progress: in 2015, across 881 national environmental-sector ministries from 193 countries, only 12% of Ministers are women. Five years later, in 2020, women held 15% of top jobs as ministers of environmental sectors. Accessible at <https://www.iucn.org/news/gender/202103/new-data-reveals-slow-progress-achieving-gender-equality-environmental-decision-making>
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