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**Accelerating gender equality in the water domain:  
A call for action**

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\*The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.



## ACCELERATING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WATER DOMAIN: A CALL FOR ACTION

An advocacy initiative from the UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme  
and the convened Water and Gender Multi-Stakeholder Coalition

<https://bit.ly/AcceleratingGenderEquality>

### BACKGROUND

Access to freshwater is not only a key requirement to ensure human well-being, support livelihoods and facilitate overall development, it moreover influences the multiple dimensions of gender equality. Simultaneously, gender equality in water resources governance and management is a prerequisite for the achievement of water security. Indeed, achieving gender equality in the water domain is crucial in view of the global commitments enshrined in the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and in numerous other international gender- and water-related commitments.

In 2020, the Global Community celebrated the 25th anniversary of the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women (Beijing+25) as well as the 10-year milestone to the completion of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However, comprehensive analysis quantifying the progress made towards gender equality in the water domain seemed to be incomplete or absent.

To that end, the UNESCO's World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP) undertook such analysis together with a dedicated 'Water and Gender Working Group', formed by over 50 experts from UN Agencies, governmental water offices from Member States, universities and NGOs. The resulting publication reveals how the world is not on track with the global promises made in the field of gender and water, in the majority of the development dimensions -health, education, agricultural production, governance-, and that the water domain remains characterized by deep and persistent gender inequalities.

Despite advances at the policy level in acknowledging the need to progress towards gender equality in the water sector, large gender inequalities persist in practice. Women are generally under-represented in terms of participation at all levels: from institutional bodies that manage national or transboundary waters, to water-related institutions such as governmental water agencies and water utilities, to local

water management institutions. For instance, less than 17% of the water sector's total workforce is composed of women despite their critical role and knowledge in the management of water resources.

**On this behalf, UNESCO WWAP - alongside a Multi-stakeholder Coalition - is facilitating a global [Call for Action 'Accelerating gender equality in the water domain: bridging the data gap and developing concrete actions'](#).**

## THE OBJECTIVE

The scope of this Initiative is to bring attention to the need of accelerating gender equality and the empowerment of women in the water domain, as well as to encourage the development and implementation of gender-inclusive strategies. This initiative therefore calls upon decision-makers, political leaders, governors and policy-makers, financiers, CEOs and other relevant actors to accelerate concrete actions towards the achievement of: *water access to all without discrimination; promoting women's leadership in water management and governance; protecting women's water rights and applying gender-equal financing, narrowing the gender gap between policy and practice, prioritizing the collection of sex-disaggregated water data and counter-fighting norms and stereotypes that disadvantage women and girls*. All relevant stakeholders are invited to join forces with UNESCO WWAP and the Multi-stakeholder Coalition in order to accelerate the achievement of gender equality in water for a more just, sustainable and peaceful future.

## MODALITY

This Call for Action Initiative is based on three main pillars:

1. A **factual basis** formed by an in-depth analysis document '[Taking Stock of the Progress towards Gender Equality in the Water Domain - Where do we stand 25 years after the Beijing Declaration?](#)';
2. Concrete **recommendations for action** contained in a joint [Position Paper 'Accelerating Gender Equality in the Water Domain – A Call For Action'](#), to the attention of leaders and other relevant stakeholders;
3. **Awareness and Dissemination:** Spreading the word on the Initiative, its key findings and recommendations is critical for reaching as many stakeholders as possible, ensuring widespread support and action at regional and local levels in order to catalyse progress in the field. To that end, the Call for Action Initiative seeks the support of a broad multi-stakeholder network.

## THE MULTI-STAKEHOLDER COALITION

To amplify the resonance of this critical Call, the Initiative is supported by a broad '**Multi-stakeholder Coalition**' consisting of –but not limited to- UN agencies, international and regional organizations, Member States' institutions, funding agencies, ODAs, NGOs, private sector and civil society. Any interested stakeholder can join the Coalition to represent their institution or organization in support of the Call for Action and show commitment to the promotion of gender equality in water.

All members of the Coalition are invited to:

- Spread knowledge on the Initiative by sharing the [Taking Stock analysis](#), [Position Paper](#) and [dedicated communication materials](#) through social, media and mailing networks;
- Present the Call for Action and its supporting publications at various international, national and local events, as discussed under the next section. A standard power point presentation will be made available.

## THE ROADMAP TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WATER SECTOR BY 2030

The Call for Action Initiative was launched at global level in August 2021 at the SIWI World Water Week with support of 11 Member States, and is set to culminate into 2030, coinciding with the completion date of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. Two important milestones will be: i) The UN Conference on the Mid-term review of the Water Action Decade in 2023, and ii) The celebrations marking the end of the International Water Decade 2018-2028.

A number of key events for the period 2021-2023 have been identified in a roadmap (Fig. 1):



Figure 1. 2021-2023 Call for Action Initiative Roadmap: key events for presentation and progress updates

Countries and regions are encouraged to organize dedicated regional events for the presentation of this Call and to showcase the concrete commitments and actions assumed by countries and institutions.

The Call for Action activities, including events at international, regional and national scale can be followed through the [Call for Action webpage](#) and through [Twitter](#).

## ACCELERATING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WATER DOMAIN THROUGH SEX-DISAGGREGATED DATA AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

One of the core recommendations of the Call for Action Initiative is to prioritize the collection of sex-disaggregated data, in order to inform as well as change water policies. Another recommendation is to foster women's leadership in water decision-making beyond participation, backed by capacity development for all.

The WWAP Water and Gender Component aligns with these recommendations as it aims to bridge the existing data gap and create the baseline knowledge, indispensable to inform water policies and produce gender transformative actions in national plans and strategies, in light of the achievement of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030.

In particular, a methodology was developed for the collection of sex-disaggregated water data with its own gender-responsive indicators ([UNESCO WWAP 2019 Toolkit](#)), setting a global standard for gender responsive/transformational water monitoring and assessment. The application of this methodology is supported through a dedicated capacity development programme that offers training on 'water and gender', tailored to the specific requirements of countries and regions, and fit to the needs of a wide range of users (governmental staff, policy-makers, researchers, students, non-governmental entities, regional organizations including river basins and transboundary commissions, and community organizations). The flexible training approach consists of training sessions of variable duration according to the needs of the recipient, from the recommended 5 days for the complete training course, an introductory version of 2 days, or extended "on-demand" trainings. The trainings are designed to be delivered in both face-to-face and virtual formats.