Gender Equality in the Chemical Weapons Regime

"The chemical science community must confront systemic disadvantages and enable as many different kinds of people as possible to contribute to scientific discovery and innovation."

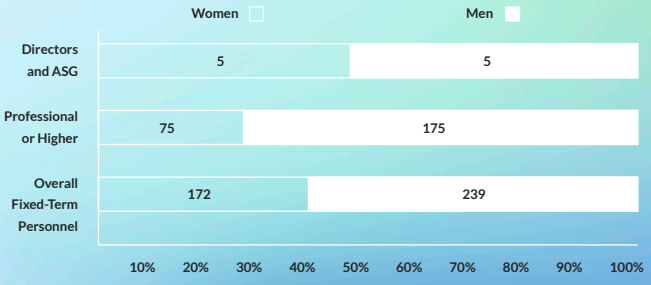
– Royal Society of Chemistry, 2018[1]

- Data from the US and the UK indicates that the proportion of women completing undergraduate degrees in chemistry is higher than in most of other STEM subjects, with nearly 50% of the bachelor's degrees in chemistry being awarded to women.[2]
- Out of the 186 laureates of Nobel Prize in Chemistry, only 7 are women.
- The gender gap widens as one moves up from the undergraduate to senior levels, showing a negative correlation between the proportion of women and seniority in this discipline.
- Women's underrepresentation can reinforce existing biases in scientific research and thwart opportunities for discovery and innovation in the chemical sciences.

GENDER BALANCE IN THE OPCW TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT[3]

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) oversees the global endeavor to permanently and verifiably eliminate chemical weapons. Its Technical Secretariat comprises over 400 staff members recruited from more than 80 OPCW Member States.

In addition to achieving gender parity at the leadership level, the Secretariat established a network of Gender Focal Points to provide support, counsel, and training initiatives to encourage work/life balance and gender mainstreaming at every level of the Organisation.



GENDER BALANCE IN CWC CONFERENCES OF THE STATES PARTIES (2015-2019)

Following a recurrent pattern in arms control and disarmament diplomacy, women are underrepresented in the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), comprising, on average, a third of the diplomats.[4]

IDEAS FOR ACTION

1. **Engage** in initiatives that combat harmful gender stereotypes in sciences and promote gender equality in STEM, e.g. OPCW's Women in Chemistry Symposium, Ada Lovelace Day, Diversify Chemistry
2. **Ensure** that women and men are equally represented in panel discussions, by planning participation early and by focusing on speaker expertise.
3. **Distribute** relevant resources on gender ahead of CWC Conferences of States Parties, such as the Gender & Disarmament Resource Pack developed by the International Gender Champions Disarmament Impact Group.
4. **Track** participation of men and women as speakers and make the data available.

1) Diversity landscape of the chemical sciences. Royal Society of Chemistry. https://www.rsc.org/globalassets/02-about-us/our-strategy/inclusion-diversity/cm-044-17_a4-diversity-landscape-of-the-chemical-sciences-report_web-2.pdf

2) American Physical Society, 2018, www.aps.org/programs/education/statistics/; Higher education student and staff records, HESA, https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis.

3) Data from the OPCW Technical Secretariat obtained in November 2020.

4) See R. H. Dalaqua, K. Egeland and T. G. Hugo, Still Behind the Curve: Gender Balance in Arms Control, Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Diplomacy, UNIDIR, 2019, https://unidir.org/publication/still-behind-curve

Sex-specific and Gendered Impacts of Chemical Weapons

WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE?[5]

- Research has indicated variation in levels of susceptibility between men and women to toxic agents, as well as sex-specific problems in reprodauctive health and obstetric difficulties, including miscarriages and infertility.
- In previous chemical incidents, gender roles have shaped distinct experiences of social stigma among individuals. The threat of stigmatization can dissuade people from seeking medical assistance and reporting cases.
- In the event of chemical weapons use, gender roles may lead to different levels of exposure between men and women, especially when one gender shoulders most of the caregiving responsibilities in both domestic and professional settings.
- Studies have shown that children may be at greater risk of exposure than adults to toxic effects of chemical weapons.

WHY IT MATTERS

- Knowledge of sex-specific and gendered effects can inform public health protocols, including medical screening and treatment.
- Awareness of sex-specific differences, as well as of gendered dynamics, can lead to more effective assistance, including specific actions to minimize stigma and empower survivors.
- Applying a gender lens to public health response can increase resilience to and aid recovery from a chemical weapons attack, ultimately enhancing the security and well-being of States and people.

IDEAS FOR ACTION

1. **Mainstream** sex and gender analysis in national public health systems, ensuring the collection of sex-and age-disaggregated data.
2. **Support** the establishment of mechanisms to collect sex- and age-disaggregated data in OPCW fact-finding missions.
3. **Adopt** agenda items that consider gender perspectives in the implementation of the CWC, including in the provision of assistance.
4. **Fund and support** research on the differentiated impacts of toxic agents among women, men, boys and girls.
5. **Identify and overcome** gendered communication barriers to get health messages through to key actors, such as primary caregivers.
6. **Provide** gender-responsive assistance to survivors of chemical incidents, taking into account sex-specific and gendered impacts.

5) See Dalaqua, R.H.; Revill J.; Connel, N.; Hay, A., Missing Links: Understanding Sex- and Gender-Related Impacts of Chemical and Biological Weapons, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), 2019, https://unidir.org/publication/missing-links-understanding-sex-and-gender-related-impacts-chemical-and-biological