

# STILL BEHIND THE CURVE

GENDER BALANCE  
IN ARMS CONTROL,  
NON-PROLIFERATION AND  
DISARMAMENT DIPLOMACY

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## **ABOUT THE GENDER & DISARMAMENT PROGRAMME**

The UNIDIR Gender & Disarmament Programme seeks to contribute to the strategic goals of achieving gender equality in disarmament forums and effectively applying gender perspectives into disarmament processes. It encompasses original research, outreach activities and resource tools to support disarmament stakeholders in translating gender awareness into practical action.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This study was made possible with support from the governments of Ireland, Norway and Sweden. In addition, the authors are grateful to Dr. John Borrie, Courtney Cresap, Dr. Renata Dwan and Dr. Ann Towns for their thoughtful comments and suggestions. They would also like to thank Lenka Filipová for her assistance in preparing this publication.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

>> In recent years, interest has grown in gender and diplomacy, as well as in the role of women in international policymaking, among academics and practitioners alike. As the landmark Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) approaches its twentieth anniversary, Member States' representatives and other stakeholders have also been vocal in their support for the equal, full and effective participation of women not only in peacemaking, but in all decision-making processes related to arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament.

This study presents quantitative analysis and key figures illustrating the gender balance in multilateral forums dealing with arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. Drawing on focus-group discussions with diplomats and practitioners, the study also offers reflections on gendered patterns in the diplomatic field.

## **The main findings of this study are summarized below.**

- The proportion of women participating in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament diplomacy (hereafter “disarmament diplomacy”) has grown steadily over the last four decades, but women remain underrepresented.
- There is a correlation between gender composition and the total number of delegates to a given meeting. In large meetings (over 100 participants), the average proportion of women is 32 per cent. In small forums (less than 100 participants), the average proportion of women drops significantly, to 20 per cent.
- There is an association between gender and the distribution of diplomats across United Nations General Assembly Main Committees. While the First Committee (on disarmament and international security) has the lowest proportion of women (33 per cent in 2017), the Third Committee (on social, humanitarian and cultural issues) has the highest proportion of women (49 per cent in 2017). Although the proportion of women representatives has gradually increased, this pattern of gendered distribution of diplomats has been consistent throughout the past four decades.
- In arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament forums, heads of delegations are mostly men. The proportion of male heads of delegation is consistently above the overall proportion of male representatives in every single meeting/session of the First Committee, the Non-Proliferation Treaty review process and the Conference on Disarmament. The opposite is true for women, who are underrepresented in leadership positions, even below what would be expected given the overall proportion of women delegates. This pattern has not changed over the past four decades.
- The proportion of women tends to decline as the importance of the posi-

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tion increases, while the proportion of men grows linearly as one moves from regular diplomatic personnel to United Nations ambassadors, to foreign ministers and, lastly, to heads of State or Government.

- There is significant variation in the gender distribution of delegates to disarmament forums across the United Nations regional groups. The Latin American and Caribbean Group and the Western European and Others Group have the highest proportions of women delegates. Delegations from the African Group and the Asia–Pacific Group skew toward higher proportions of men delegates.

- High-income States tend to send more gender-balanced delegations than low-income States to disarmament diplomacy forums.

- Multilateral practitioners differ in their views on the likely causes of women’s underrepresentation and the links between gender equality and disarmament diplomacy. Possible causes suggested by diplomats during this research were: the perceived binary hierarchies between male–female and hard–soft policy issues; the military nature of the subject matter; work–life balance; institutional and informal practices that sustain gendered hierarchies and divisions of labour; and lack of consensus on the impact of socially constructed gender attributes in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament negotiations.

# INTRODUCTION

Arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament diplomacy (hereafter “disarmament diplomacy”) has long been characterized by a noticeable gender imbalance, where women are under-represented at all levels. In view of this, various States and organizations have recognized the need for greater diversity at the negotiating table and have expressed their support to the active and equal, full and effective participation of women in decision-making processes related to international security and disarmament.<sup>1</sup>

These calls are in line with Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, adopted in 2000. The normative power of this and subsequent resolutions has been used to advocate for increased participation of women in formal peace negotiations, in the military, in peacekeeping, in post-conflict governance bodies and in all centres of power where decisions are made.<sup>2</sup> The women, peace and security agenda has been a driving force for inclusion as well as for research on

the role of women in preventing conflict and brokering and sustaining peace. But it was not until recently that these perspectives began to appear in multilateral arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament talks.

Recognizing that women have been powerful agents for peace and progress, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres included gender parity in his Agenda for Disarmament (2018), arguing that “involving more women will help revitalize disarmament discussions”.<sup>3</sup> Member States have also acknowledged the importance of including the voices of women in international security deliberations, as is evident in the growing number of First Committee resolutions addressing the equal participation of women.<sup>4</sup> Similar acknowledgements and pledges have featured in working papers, chairs’ summaries and other official documents related to the main arms control and disarmament instruments.<sup>5</sup>

1 See, for example, the statements delivered by Australia, Canada, Costa Rica, Ghana, Ireland, Namibia, the Netherlands, Paraguay, and Portugal during the 2018 First Committee general and thematic debates (8–31 October 2018), available at [www.reachingcriticalwill.org](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org).

2 The women, peace and security agenda was established by resolution 1325 (2000) and further developed in resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), and 2242 (2015).

3 United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*, 2018, [https://front.un-arm.org/documents/SG+disarmament+agenda\\_1.pdf](https://front.un-arm.org/documents/SG+disarmament+agenda_1.pdf).

4 From 2017 to 2018, the number of First Committee resolutions including gender perspectives grew from 11 to 17 resolutions. See First Committee Monitor, no. 6, 2018, <http://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/1com/FCM18/FCM-2018-No6.pdf>.

5 See, for example, Working Paper Presented by the President of the Fifth Conference of State Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty, “Gender and Gender Based Violence”, document ATT/CSP5/2019/PRES/410/PM1.GenderGBV, 15 January 2019; Chair’s factual summary (working paper), document NPT/CONF.2020/PC.II/WP.41, 16 May 2018, para. 10; Working paper submitted by Ireland to the 2018 Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT, “Impact and Empowerment – The Role of Gender in the NPT”, document NPT/CONF.2020/PC.II/WP.38, 24 April 2018.



In order to contribute to these efforts, this study presents a systematic analysis of gender balance in multilateral forums dealing with arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. Building upon previous UNIDIR studies, part 1 provides numbers, patterns, and trends on gender balance in this policy area.<sup>6</sup> It shows that more women are participating in this diplomatic field, but obstacles remain, especially when it comes to small forums. When States can only send one representative to a disarmament meeting, they almost always send a man. Women are typically included as the second or, more often, third or fourth member of their respective delegations.

Another important challenge identified in this study refers to the level of participation, as women are severely underrepresented in leadership positions. Men are overrepresented as heads of delegations, to an even greater degree than would be expected given the overall proportion of men in a meeting. For instance, in 2018, 76 per cent of heads of delegations participating in the First Committee, Conference on Disarmament, and Preparatory Committee of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT PrepCom) were men – a proportion above the 66 per cent overall proportion of male delegates in these forums. In contrast, 24 per cent of heads of delega-

tions to those meetings were women – a number below the 34 per cent overall proportion of women delegates.

These numbers are useful in order to provide a general assessment of gender (im)balance, but they cannot tell the full story. While there is presently strong interest among policymakers in the numerical representation of women, much less attention is given to the gendered structures and power dynamics of diplomacy. As analysts have observed, this constitutes a paradox, as an increase in number does not necessarily translate to an increase in power or meaningful, impactful representation.<sup>7</sup> More than simply adding women, a deeper understanding of the associations between power, status, and gender is needed if equality is ever to be achieved in disarmament diplomacy.

As an initial step towards a qualitative analysis of the linkages between gender and arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament diplomacy, part 2 of this study presents key reflections from focus groups discussions with multilateral practitioners. On those occasions, diplomats and disarmament experts offered views on the likely causes of women's underrepresentation in this field and the potential benefits of greater gender diversity. Factors highlighted by several of the practitioners consulted were the perceived binary hierarchies

6 UNIDIR and ILPI, *Gender, Development and Nuclear Weapons: Shared Goals, Shared Concerns*, 2016, <http://www.unidir.org/files/publications/pdfs/gender-development-and-nuclear-weapons-en-659.pdf>.

7 See K. Aggestam and A. Towns, "The Gender Turn in Diplomacy: A New Research Agenda," *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vo. 21, no. 1, 2018; J. Cassidy, "Conclusion: Progress and Policies towards a Gender-Even Playing Field", in J. Cassidy (ed.), *Gender and Diplomacy*, Routledge, 2017.

between male-female and hard-soft policy issues, the military nature of the subject matter, work–life balance, institutional and informal practices that sustain gendered hierarchies and divisions of labour, and a knowledge gap on the impact of women in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament negotiations.

Finally, part 3 presents concluding thoughts and proposes questions for further research on the gendered world of arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament diplomacy.

## Note on terminology

Growing awareness of women's representation and empowerment has been accompanied by an interest in the application of gender analysis to international security problems. Although these are welcome developments, there is still some confusion about key terminology.

### GENDER

A classic formulation understands gender as “a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes”.<sup>8</sup> As others have observed, gender points to a relational view of male, female, and trans categories as contextually and relationally defined.<sup>9</sup>

Gender norms are socially constructed differences – as opposed to biological differences (sex) – and they function as social rules of behaviour, setting out what is desirable and possible to do as a male or female. It has been noted that, “as organizers of social relationships, gender norms are power-laden both in terms of defining the roles and expectations of men and women and in terms of distributing social power and prestige between different gender roles”.<sup>10</sup>

### GENDER EQUALITY<sup>11</sup>

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys, as well as non-binary or gender-fluid persons. Equality means that a person's rights, responsibilities, and opportuni-

ties will not depend on their gender. It implies that the interests, needs, and priorities of everyone – men, women, girls, boys, non-binary or gender-fluid persons – are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups.

### GENDER ANALYSIS<sup>12</sup>

Gender analysis is a critical examination of how differences in gender roles, activities, needs, opportunities and rights/entitlements affect men, women, girls, boys, non-binary or gender-fluid persons in certain situation or contexts. Gender analysis examines the relationships between genders and their access to and control of resources and the constraints they face relative to each other.

Gender analysis can be integrated into all sector assessments or situational analyses to ensure that gender-based injustices and inequalities are not exacerbated by interventions and that, where possible, greater equality and justice in gender relations are promoted. When dealing with international security problems, a gender analysis can be useful to assess how the attributes, opportunities, and relationships associated with a gender identity may affect issues, such as the likelihood of being targeted by weapons systems, prospects of becoming a victim/survivor of armed violence, the ability to access medical attention in the aftermath of armed conflict, and the long-lasting biological and physiological impacts of weapons on individuals.<sup>13</sup>

8 J. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *The American Historical Review*, 1986, quoted in A. Towns and B. Niklasson, “Gender, International Status, and Ambassador Appointments”, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2017.

9 Ibid. While this study recognizes that gender goes beyond the binary notion of male and female, it restricts itself to the categories of men and women. It does so in view of the limitations regarding empirical mapping of the numbers of non-binary or gender-fluid persons in diplomacy.

10 A. Towns and B. Niklasson, “Gender, International Status, and Ambassador Appointments”, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2017, p. 525.

11 This is an expanded definition based on the Gender Equality Glossary provided by UN Women Training Centre, <https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/mod/glossary/view.php?id=36>.

12 Idem.

13 Although gender analysis of arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament is not the focus of this paper, it should be noted that UNIDIR is currently undertaking research on this topic, seeking to identify the main elements of a gender-responsive approach to international security problems.

# 1. FACTS AND FIGURES ON GENDER IN DISARMAMENT DIPLOMACY

## a. Gender balance in forums

The diplomatic field of arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament encompasses a diverse range of topics and numerous forums.<sup>14</sup> Table 1 provides a representative, albeit non-exhaustive, sample of multilateral settings over the past decade. It includes 23 forums of various types (e.g. technical committees, working groups, groups of governmental experts, meetings of States Parties, negotiations) on distinct subjects (e.g. disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, control and regulation of conventional weapons, governance of dual-use materials and technologies), convened in different cities (e.g. New York, Geneva, Vienna). For each forum, the table presents the total number of representatives, as well as the percentages of men and women, ordered by the proportion of women, from the smallest to the largest.

The data presented in table 1 shows that the proportion of women participating in arms control, non-proliferation

and disarmament discussions from 2008 to 2018 varies between 0 and 37 per cent. The table also indicates that the absolute numbers of participants in a meeting is a key factor determining gender balance. Small forums tend to be particularly dominated by men, while larger forums (i.e., meetings of more than 100 participants) consistently attract a larger proportion of women.

<sup>14</sup> The policy field that became known as ‘arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament’ has its roots in multilateral diplomatic practices of the twentieth century that sought to restrict or prohibit certain kinds of military technologies, weapons and practices. For additional information and analyses, see H. Mueller, “Arms Control and Arms Reductions in Foreign Policy”, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, 2017; and J. Mendelsohn and D. Grahame, *Arms Control Chronology*, Center for Defense Information, 2002.

**TABLE 1. ARMS CONTROL, NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT FORUMS<sup>15</sup>**

<b>Forum / meeting</b>	<b>Representatives</b>	<b>Men %</b>	<b>Women %</b>
GGE: AMMUNITION (2008)	17	100%	0%
GGE: OUTER SPACE (2012–13)	15	100%	0%
GGE: NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT VERIFICATION (2018–19)	27	93%	7%
GGE: MISSILES (2007–08)	28	93%	7%
GGE: FISSILE MATERIALS (2017–18)	30	87%	13%
GGE: MILITARY EXPENDITURES (2016)	18	83%	17%
GGE: INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY (2016–17)	26	81%	19%
SECURITY COUNCIL, AVERAGE (APRIL 2018)	15	80%	20%
GGE: ARMS TRADE (2008)	28	75%	25%
ANTI-PERSONNEL MINE BAN CONVENTION MEETING OF STATES PARTIES (2017)	366	75%	25%
GGE: CONVENTIONAL ARMS REGISTER (2016)	19	74%	26%
IAEA INTERNATIONAL NUCLEAR SECURITY NETWORK WORKING GROUP (2015)	86	73%	27%
ARMS TRADE TREATY CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES (2018)	354	73%	27%
TREATY ON THE PROHIBITION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS NEGOTIATIONS (2017)	598	69%	31%
GGE: LETHAL AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS SYSTEMS (2018)	433	69%	31%
GGE: REDUCING MILITARY BUDGETS (2010–11)	15	67%	33%
CONVENTION ON CLUSTER MUNITIONS MEETING OF STATES PARTIES (2018)	273	67%	33%
BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION MEETING OF STATES PARTIES (2018)	533	67%	33%
NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY PREPCOM (2018)	603	67%	33%
CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES (2016)	671	67%	33%
ZANGGER COMMITTEE (NOV. 2018)	68	66%	34%
FIRST COMMITTEE (2018)	782	66%	34%
CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT (2018)	353	63%	37%

<sup>15</sup> For the purpose of presentation, the numbers listed in the table have been rounded. Note that GGE stands for group of governmental experts, and IAEA stands for International Atomic Energy Agency.

**FIGURE 1.**

# Gender balance in smaller forums (N<100)

■ MEN  
■ WOMEN

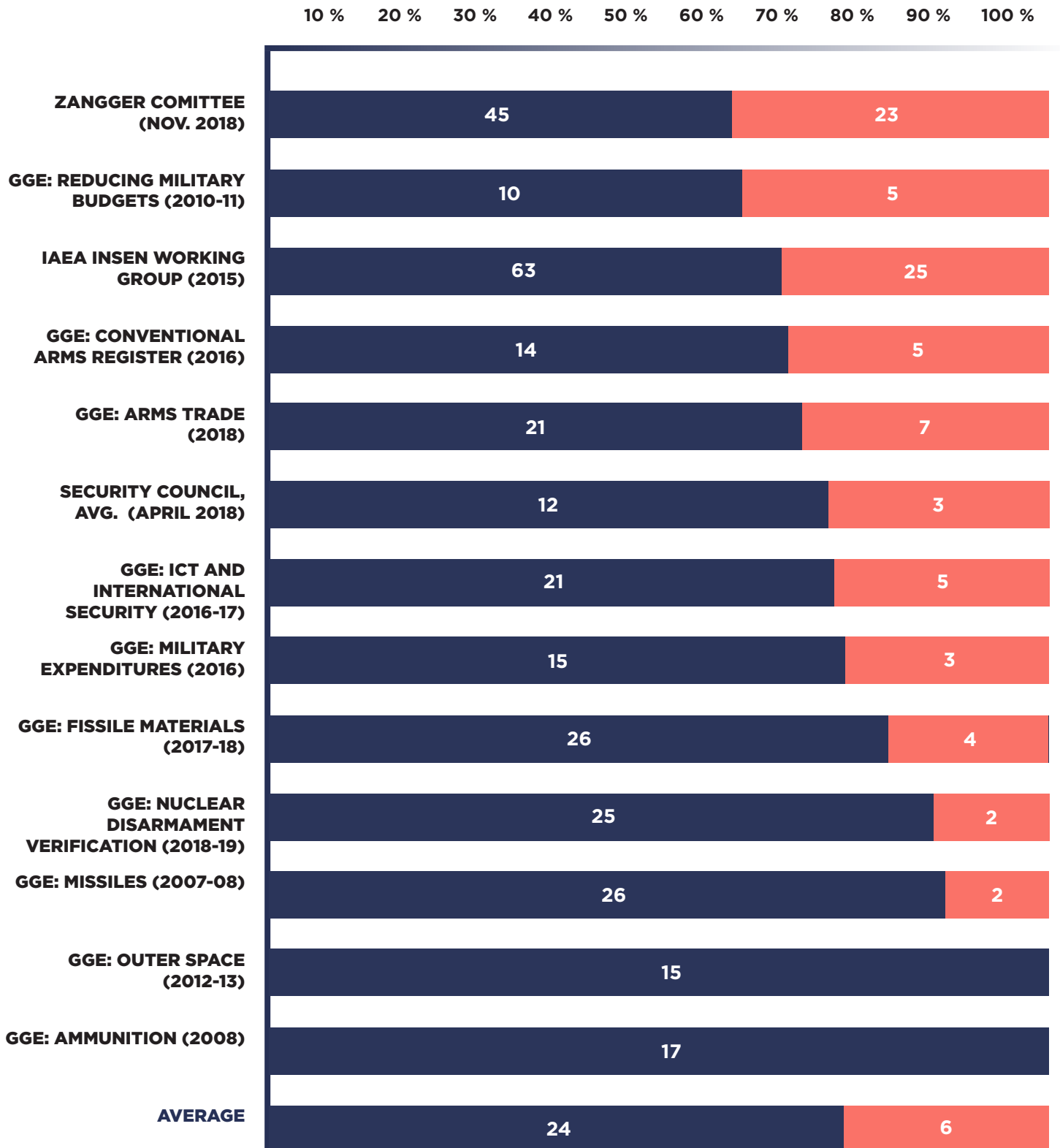


Figure 1 presents the gender distribution of meetings with less than 100 participants, where, on average, women tend to comprise 20 per cent of the total number of participants.<sup>16</sup> Figure 2 illustrates the larger forums, where the average proportion of women is 32 per cent.<sup>17</sup>

Figure 2 is useful to address a common perception voiced by diplomats in the course of this research, that forums framed as dealing with humanitarian disarmament tend to attract a larger proportion of women than forums framed as dealing with strategic weapons. This view is challenged if one looks at figure 2 and compares the gender composition of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Preparatory Committee (NPT PrepCom) – a forum that deals with nuclear weapons, commonly framed in terms of their strategic value – with that of the Meeting of States Parties of the Convention on Cluster Munition (CCM) and the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) – forums that deal with weapons that were prohibited after international humanitarian campaigns. There is no significant difference between the proportion of women attending the NPT PrepCom and the CCM meeting in 2018, 33 per

cent and 32.6 per cent, respectively. When it comes to the APMBC meeting in 2017, the proportion of women delegates drops to 25.4 per cent.

An analysis of the gender balance of eight NPT meetings (1999–2015) shows that the average proportion of women's participation is 20.95 per cent. A similar analysis of eight APMBC meetings (2002–2016) reveals an average proportion of 20.08 per cent women.<sup>18</sup> Although more research is needed, this preliminary analysis does not indicate a correlation between the discursive representation of the forum and gender distribution. The diplomats participating in forums described as humanitarian disarmament or strategic weapons seem to be part of the same community of practice.

16 The average was calculated by adding the numbers of delegates for each reported meeting and dividing by the number of meetings. The absolute numbers of delegates are reported inside the bars in figures 1, 2, 9, 12 and 13.

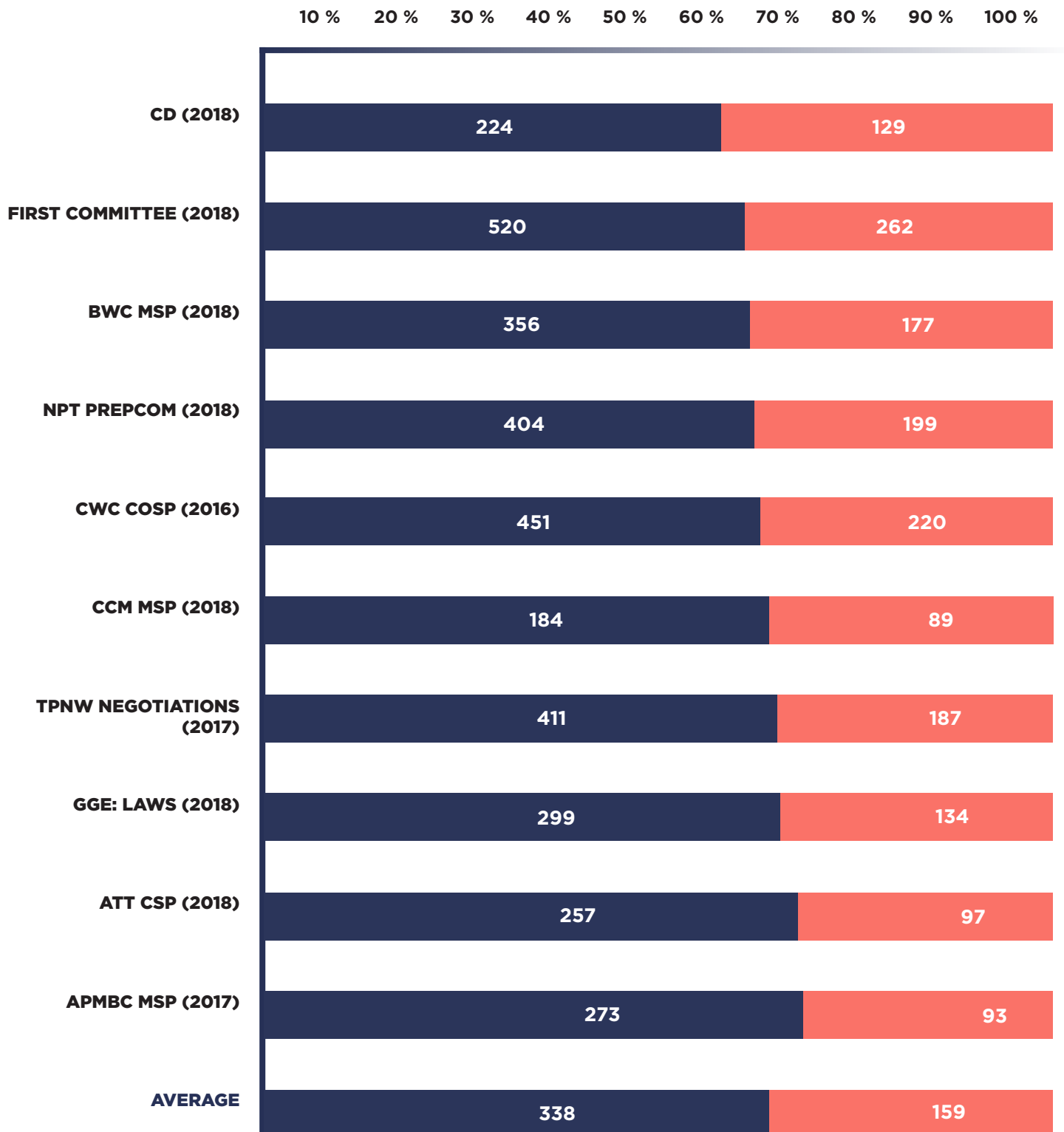
17 Note that CD stands for Conference on Disarmament, BWC MSP stands for Biological Weapons Convention Meeting of States Parties, CWC COSP stands for Chemical Weapons Convention Conference of States Parties, CCM MSP stands for Convention on Cluster Munitions Meeting of States Parties, TPNW stands for Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, LAWS stands for Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems, ATT CSP stands for Arms Trade Treaty Conference of States Parties, and APMBC MSP stands for Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention Meetings of States Parties.

18 Regarding NPT PrepComs and RevCons, the meetings considered in this analysis refer to 1999, 2000, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2014, and 2015. For the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention meetings of States Parties, the analysis includes meetings conducted in 2002, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2015, and 2016.

**FIGURE 2.**

# Gender balance in larger forums (N>100)

■ MEN  
■ WOMEN



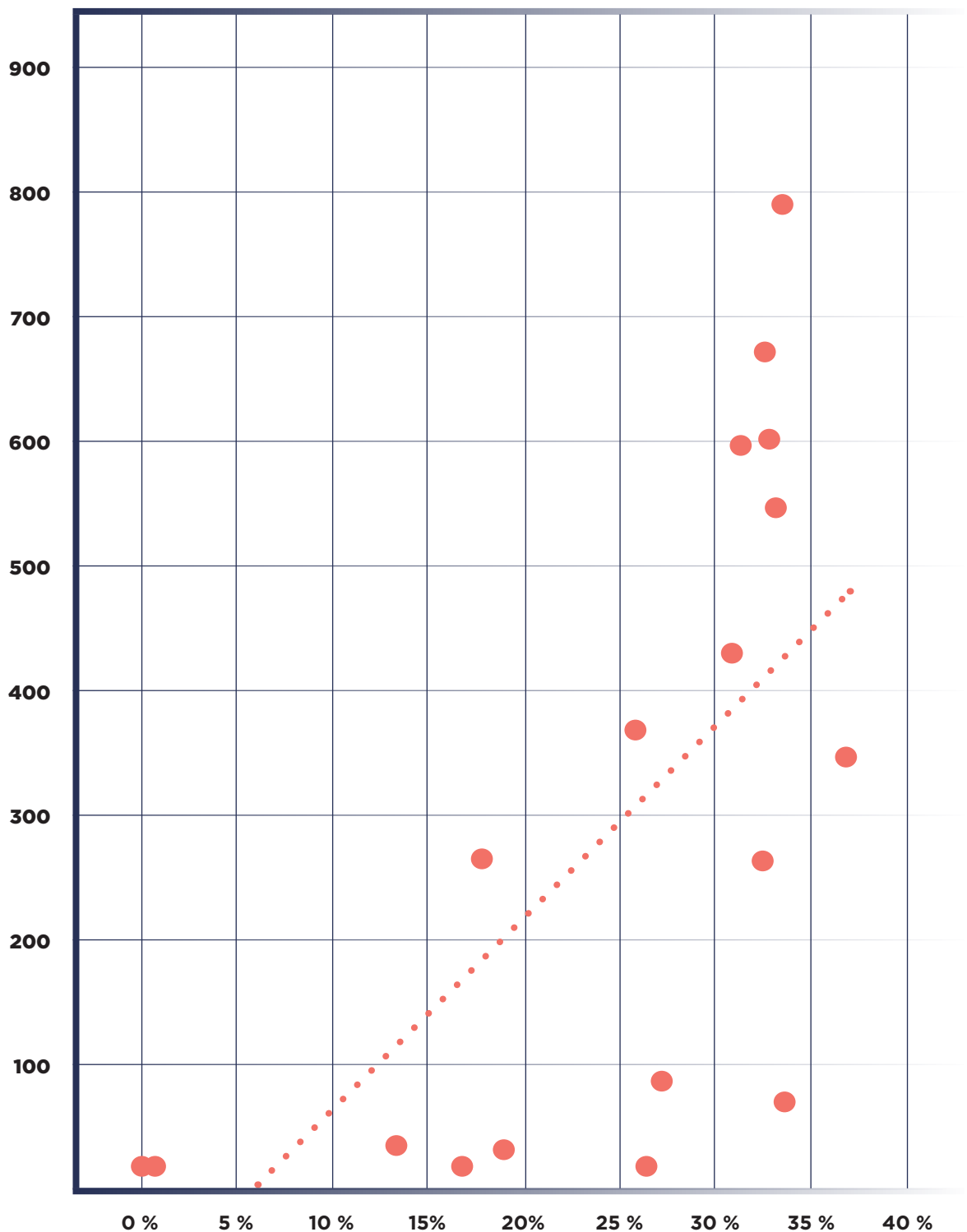


**FIGURE 3.**

● PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES

# Proportion of women by total delegates

TOTAL DELEGATES



When it comes to the gender composition of disarmament diplomacy forums, one of the most important variables is the absolute number of representatives in a given meeting. Figure 3 plots the proportion of women representatives against the absolute number of representatives at international security and disarmament meetings, showing that when the overall number of delegates increases, the proportion of women also tends to increase.<sup>19</sup>

The correlation between group size and gender composition may be explained by the fact that when States can only send a single representative, they almost always send a man. Women are typically included as the second or, more often, third or fourth member of their respective delegations.

In 2018, 10 of 168 delegations to the First Committee were made up of just one diplomat. Of these 10 individuals, 8 were men and 2 were women (20 per cent). Another 37 delegations were made up of just two diplomats. Of these, nearly half (18) were all male, while 5 were all female. The rest (14) were split evenly, producing an average proportion of women in two-person delegations of 32 per cent. For delegations with four or more diplomats, the average proportion of women was 35 per cent. The same tendency is evident in other forums. Taking the NPT PrepCom in 2018, seven delegations were made

up of just one diplomat. Of these seven persons, there was only one woman (14 per cent). For delegations with two diplomats, the average proportion of women was 23 per cent, while the average proportion for delegations with four or more diplomats was 33 per cent.

## b. Historical trends

The historical record shows that diplomacy has traditionally and formally been a domain reserved for men.<sup>20</sup> Notwithstanding, there appears to be a general perception among multilateral practitioners that the field of arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament has gradually become more open to women's participation. The data gathered in this study support this view. Figure 4 shows the proportion of women attending the First Committee, the Conference on Disarmament and the NPT review cycle from 1980 onwards.

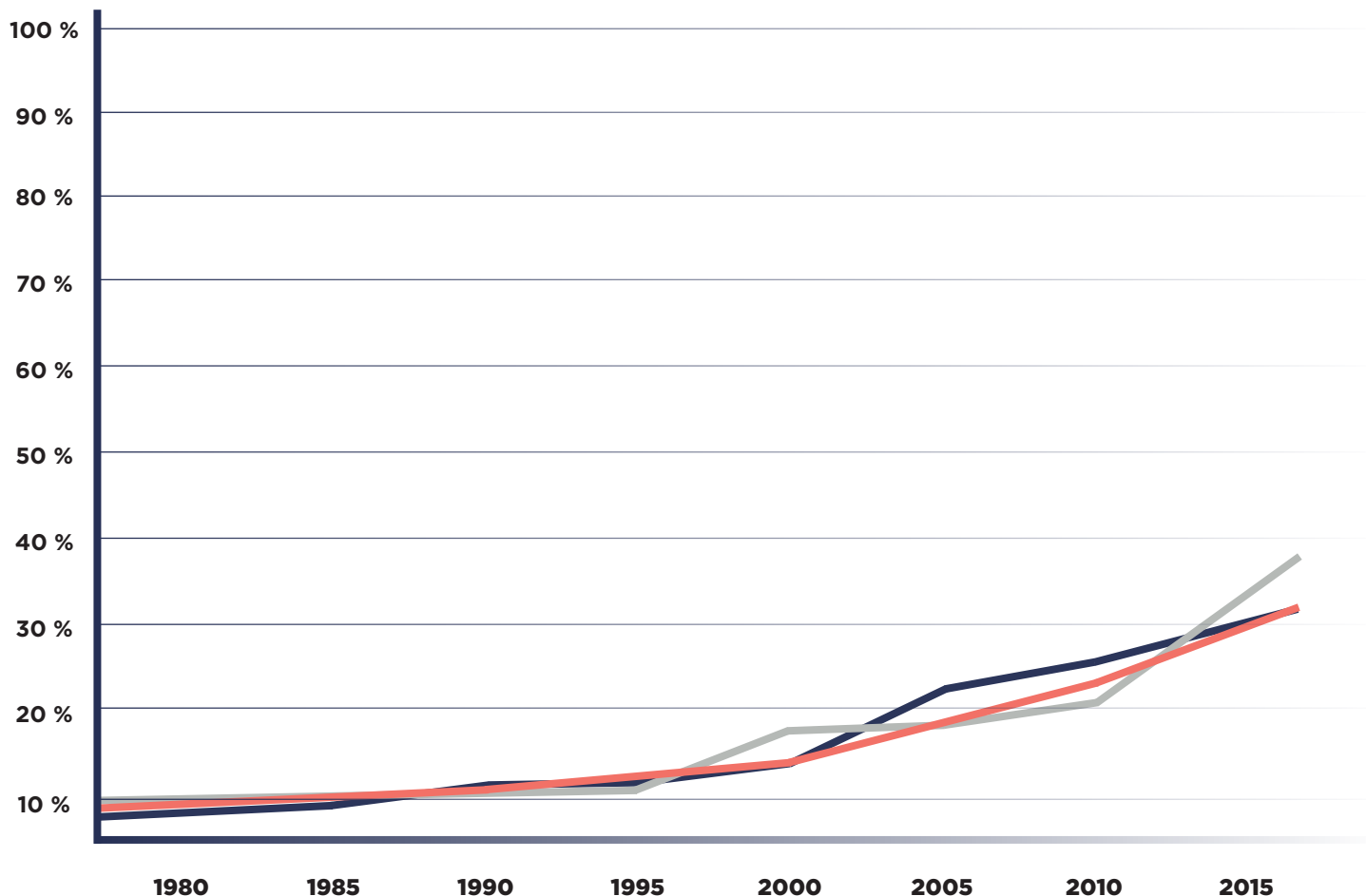
The similarity of the trend lines in figure 4 indicates that the gender balance of the three forums follows the same underlying dynamics. Whereas women were largely absent from disarmament diplomacy in the 1980s, their participation rate has steadily risen. In 2018, the Conference on Disarmament was the forum with the highest proportion of women, at 37 per cent.

19 Using the data presented in figure 3 and table 1, a Spearman's rho of 0.74 was found to be statistically significant at the 1 per cent level. Note, however, that the correlation appears much weaker once the total number of delegates exceeds 400.

20 For more on this, see the essays in A. Towns and K. Aggestam (eds.), *Gendering Diplomacy and International Negotiation*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

## FIGURE 4. Proportion of women in selected forums (1980-2018)

- FIRST COMMITTEE
- CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT
- NPT REVIEW PROCESS



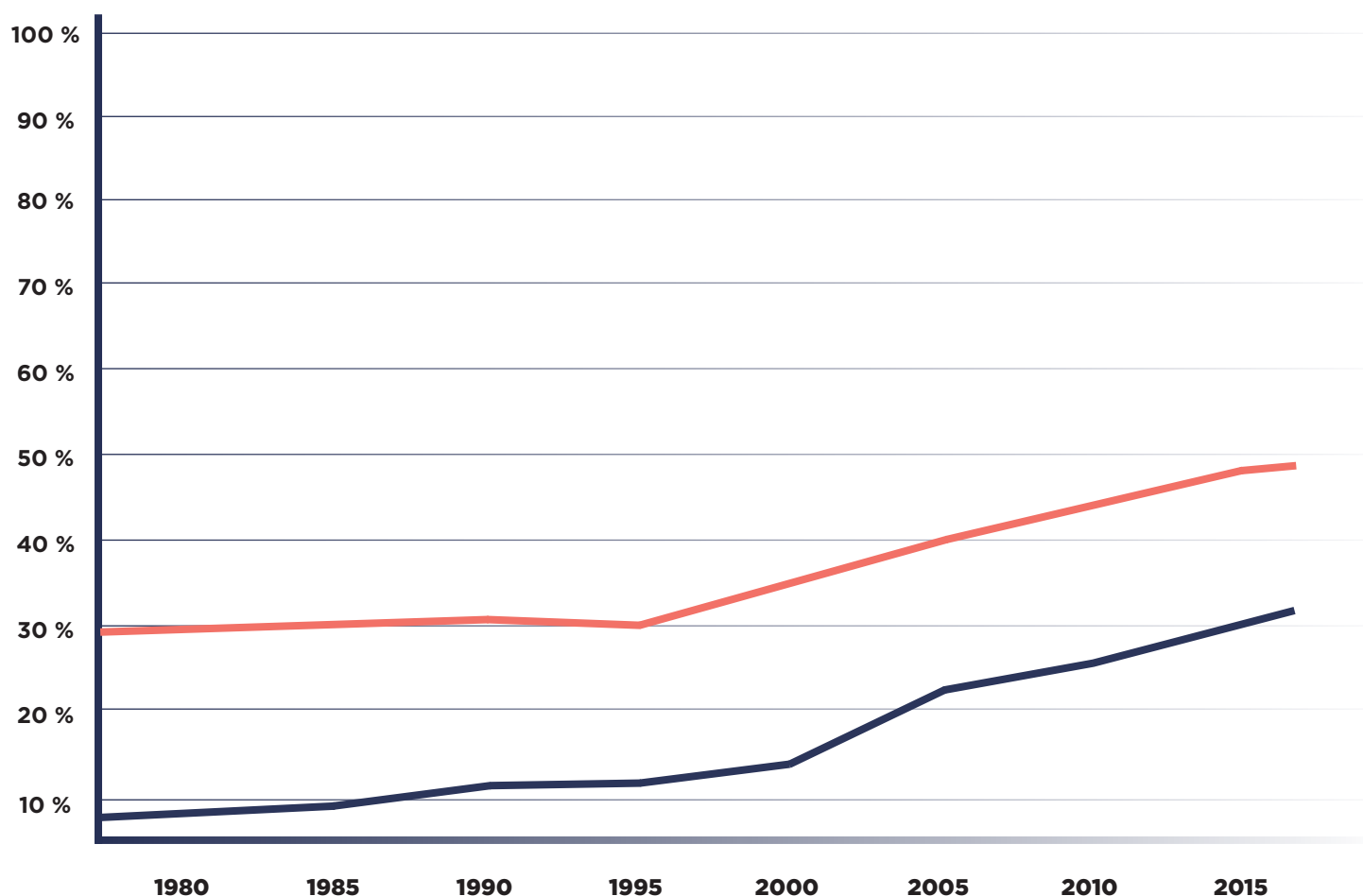
However, despite the increased numbers, it is still possible to attend a session of the Conference on Disarmament, where dozens of State representatives take the floor, and not hear a single woman speak. This shows that women’s role within this field has not progressed at the same pace as their nominal representation.

In view of women’s relatively recent arrival in the diplomatic world, some may argue that their underrepresentation is simply a consequence of the late start. Figure 5, however, points to differentiated gender patterns across policy issues, as it illustrates the proportion of women attending the two largest committees of the General Assembly, the First Committee (which deals with disarmament and international security) and the Third Committee (which deals

**FIGURE 5.**

## Proportion of women in First and Third Committees (1980-2018)

■ FIRST COMMITTEE  
■ THIRD COMMITTEE



with social, humanitarian and cultural issues).<sup>21</sup>

As figure 5 shows, men's over-representation and women's under-representation is more pronounced in the committee dealing with disarmament and international security (First Committee) than the one dealing with social, humanitarian and cultural issues (Third Committee). The figure also shows that women's participation has grown steadily and at a similar rate across the two committees, but from

ment and international security (First Committee) than the one dealing with social, humanitarian and cultural issues (Third Committee). The figure also shows that women's participation has grown steadily and at a similar rate across the two committees, but from

<sup>21</sup> A similar comparison appeared in a previous study published by UNIDIR and ILPI, *Gender, Development and Nuclear Weapons: Shared Goals, Shared Concerns*, 2016, <http://www.unidir.org/files/publications/pdfs/gender-development-and-nuclear-weapons-en-659.pdf>

different starting points. While the Third Committee now attracts a balanced number of men and women, the First Committee has just recently achieved a level of 30 per cent women delegates, a mark surpassed by the Third Committee three decades before, in 1985.

### **c. Gender balance in disarmament diplomacy versus other areas**

To gain insight into gender patterns across different policy areas, it is useful to examine the international community's primary deliberative body, the United Nations General Assembly. The General Assembly is divided into six Main Committees: (1) Disarmament and International Security, (2) Economic and Financial, (3) Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural, (4) Special Political and Decolonization, (5) Administrative and Budgetary, and (6) Legal. An obvious test of whether international security and disarmament is more male-dominated than other fields of diplomacy can be made by comparing the gender balance of the First Committee with those of the other committees of the General Assembly.

As figure 6 shows, First Committee attracted the lowest proportion of women representatives in 2017.<sup>22</sup> Despite being the largest overall, the committee that deals with Disarmament and International Security counted 32.4 per cent of women among its delegates, a figure below the total proportion of women accredited to the United Nations in New York – 35.2 per cent according to the 2018 United Nations Blue Book.<sup>23</sup> This indicates that there is an association between gender and the distribution of diplomats across the Main Committees. A straightforward interpretation of figure 4 would be that diplomats are assigned or volunteer to cover specific Main Committees in part on the basis of gender norms; while security (First Committee), political (Fourth Committee) and legal affairs (Sixth Committee) are perceived as 'masculine', humanitarian issues (Third Committee) are considered more 'feminine'; economics (Second Committee) and administration (Fifth Committee) fall somewhere in the middle.

Figure 7 corroborates the pattern seen in figures 5 and 6 by comparing the proportion of women delegates to key disarmament diplomacy meetings in Geneva in 2018 with a baseline indicator corresponding to the total proportion of women among all diplomats accredited to the United Nations in Geneva.<sup>24</sup>

22 Seeing that the lists of participants of the Second Committee in 2017 or 2016 were not available at the time of writing, this study uses the data from 2015.

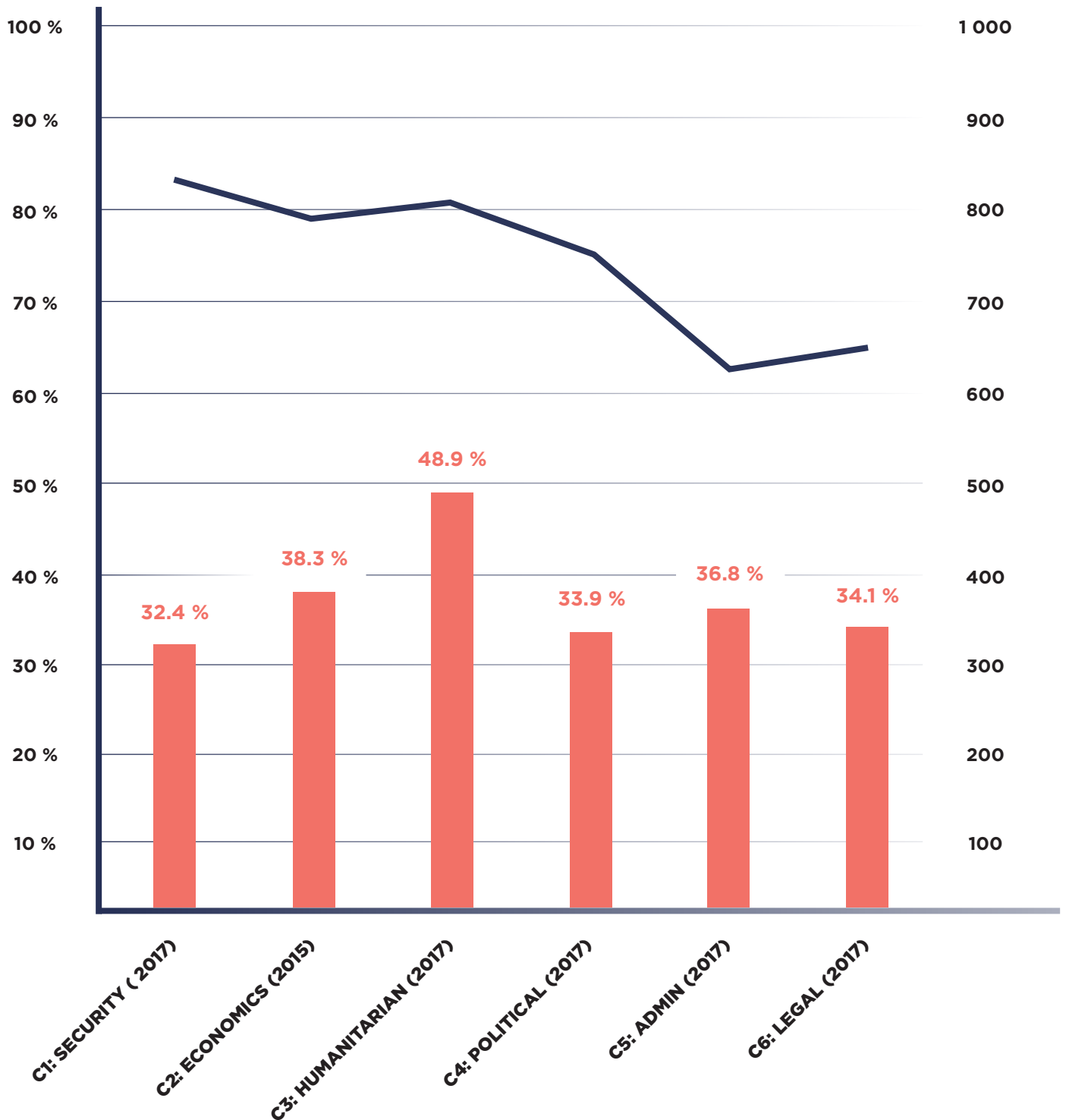
23 See document ST/PLS/SER.A/307/Rev.5, August 2018.

24 See document ST/GENEVA/SER.A/116, 2018.

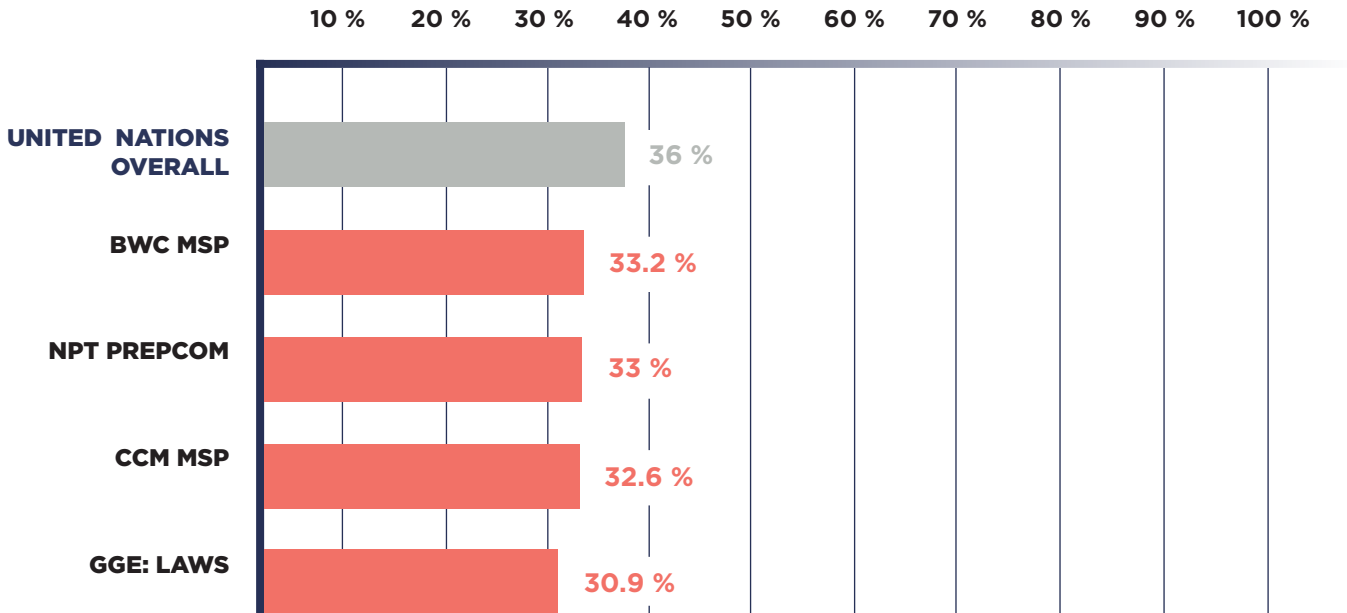
**FIGURE 6.**

# Proportion of women in Main Committees

■ PROPORTION OF WOMEN DELEGATES  
— OVERALL NUMBER OF DELEGATES



**FIGURE 7.**  
**Proportion of women in disarmament forums in Geneva (2018)**



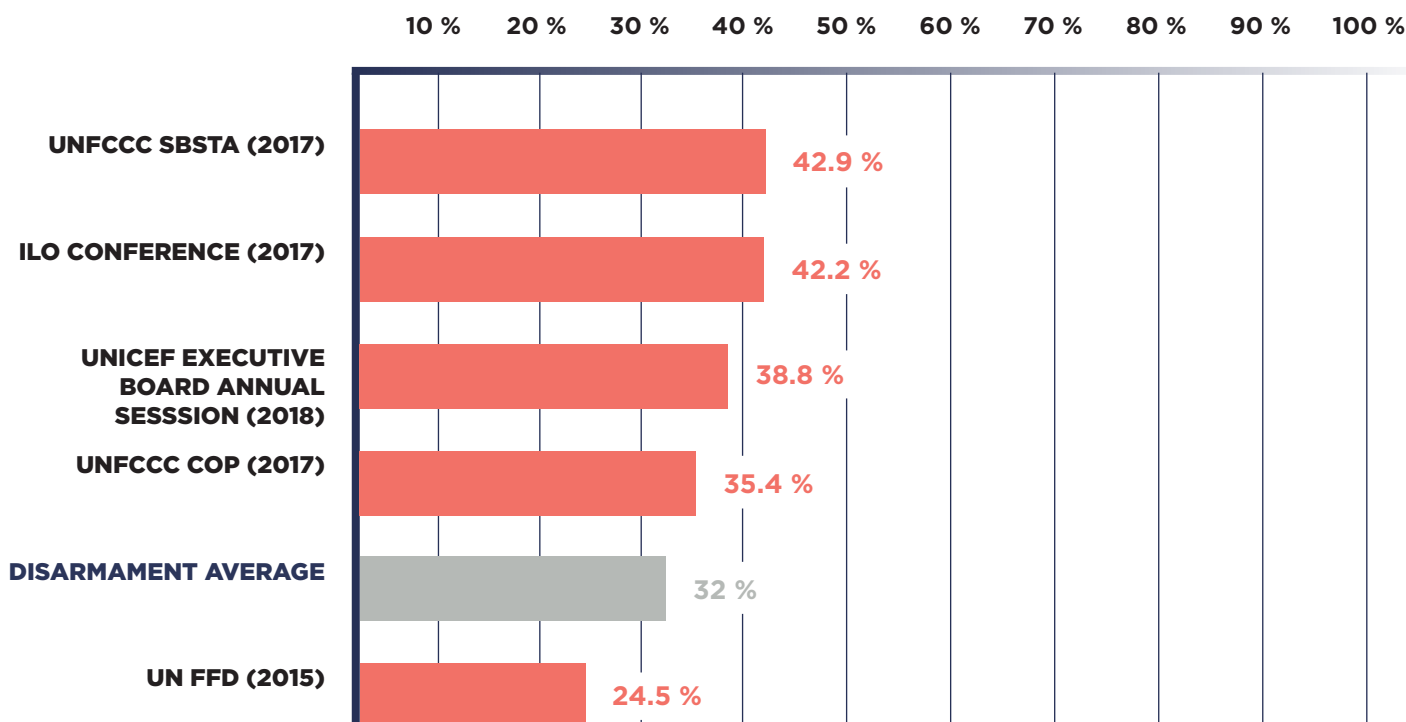
As figure 7 shows, the proportion of women in disarmament forums was in all cases lower than the baseline indicator of 36 per cent. This demonstrates that, on average, women delegates in Geneva are less likely to cover arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament than men.

To explore whether the overrepresentation of men and the underrepresentation of women are more pronounced in disarmament diplomacy than in other

policy areas, Figure 8 compares the average proportion of women in arms control forums to gender balance at one International Labour Organization conference, one United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Executive Board annual session, two United Nations Framework Conventions on Climate Change forums, as well as the Third International Conference on Financing for Development.<sup>25</sup> The comparison between these forums is based on two shared key characteristics: all of them are large in size (including hundreds

25 The disarmament average is based on the forums presented in figure 2, where the number of participants exceeds 100. Note that the two United Nations Framework Conventions on Climate Change (UNFCCC) forums are from the same meeting, in Bonn, Germany, in 2017. However, one participant list is for the Conference of Parties (COP), which includes all participants, while the other is a joint participant list for three subsidiary bodies: the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), the Subsidiary Body for Implementation, and the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement. The United Nations Conference on Financing for Development (UNFFD) meeting took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The International Labour Organization (ILO) Conference takes place each year in Geneva, Switzerland.

**FIGURE 8.**  
**Proportion of women delegates in various multilateral meetings**



of participants) and their deliberations take into account technical issues.

As figure 8 demonstrates, the average, large disarmament diplomacy forum attracts considerably fewer women than key forums dealing with aid, labour issues and climate change. In this comparison, the only forum featuring a lower proportion of women than disarmament deals with finance, which – like defence and security – is considered a ‘hard’ field (in opposition to ‘soft’ policy areas, such as education, culture, children and family).<sup>26</sup>

## **d. Gender balance in relation to political authority and prestige**

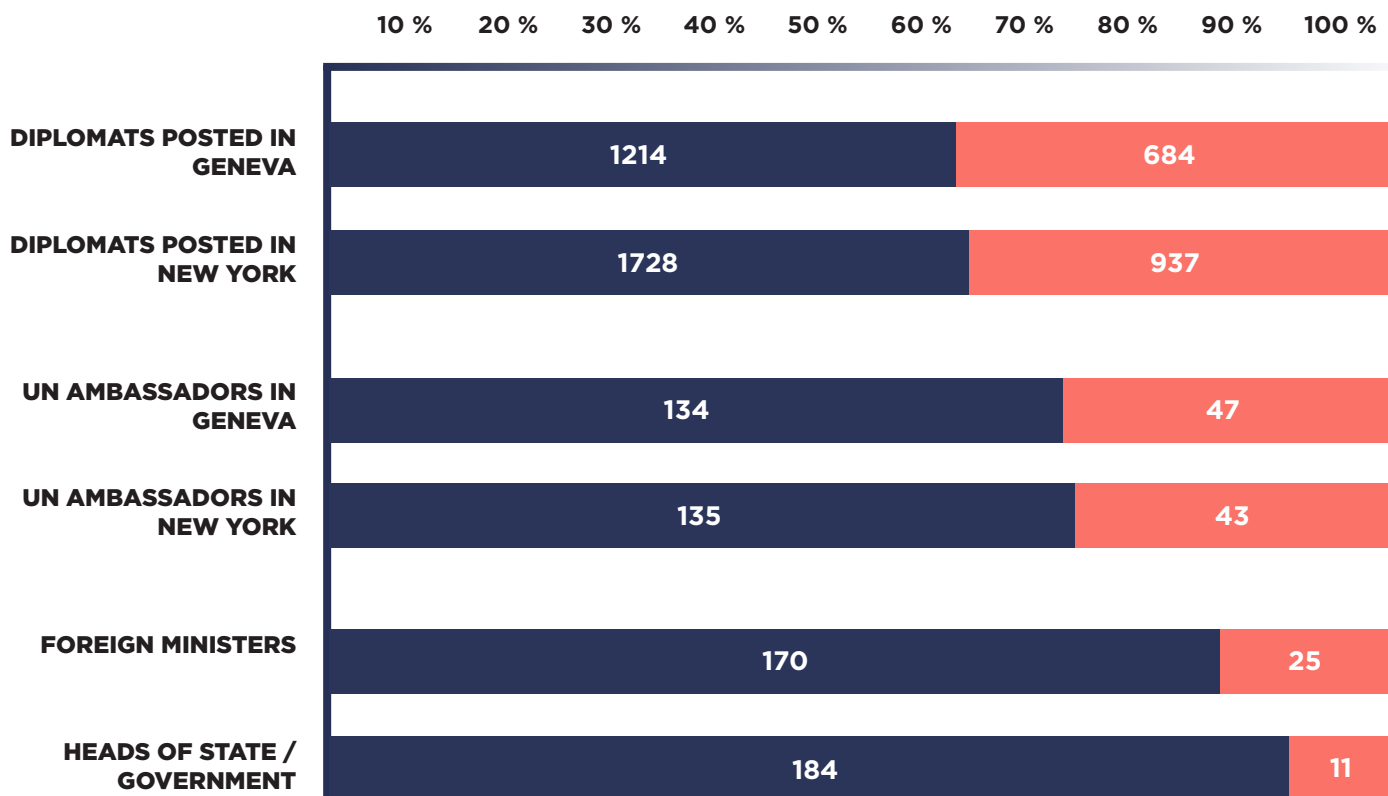
The question of women’s influence calls for an examination of the gender balance among the top positions in foreign policymaking and diplomacy. Throughout the world, men continue to be overrepresented in leadership posi-

<sup>26</sup> M. Krook and D. O’Brien, “All the President’s Men? The Appointment of Female Cabinet Ministers Worldwide”, *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 74, no. 3, 2012.



## FIGURE 9. The law of increasing disproportion

■ MEN  
■ WOMEN



tions. Figure 9 illustrates this, providing a visualization of the so-called law of increasing disproportion, according to which the proportion of women drops for every upward step on the status ladder.<sup>27</sup> As the graph demonstrates, the proportion of men grows linearly as one moves from regular diplomatic personnel to United Nations ambassadors, to foreign ministers and, lastly, to heads of State or Government.<sup>28</sup>

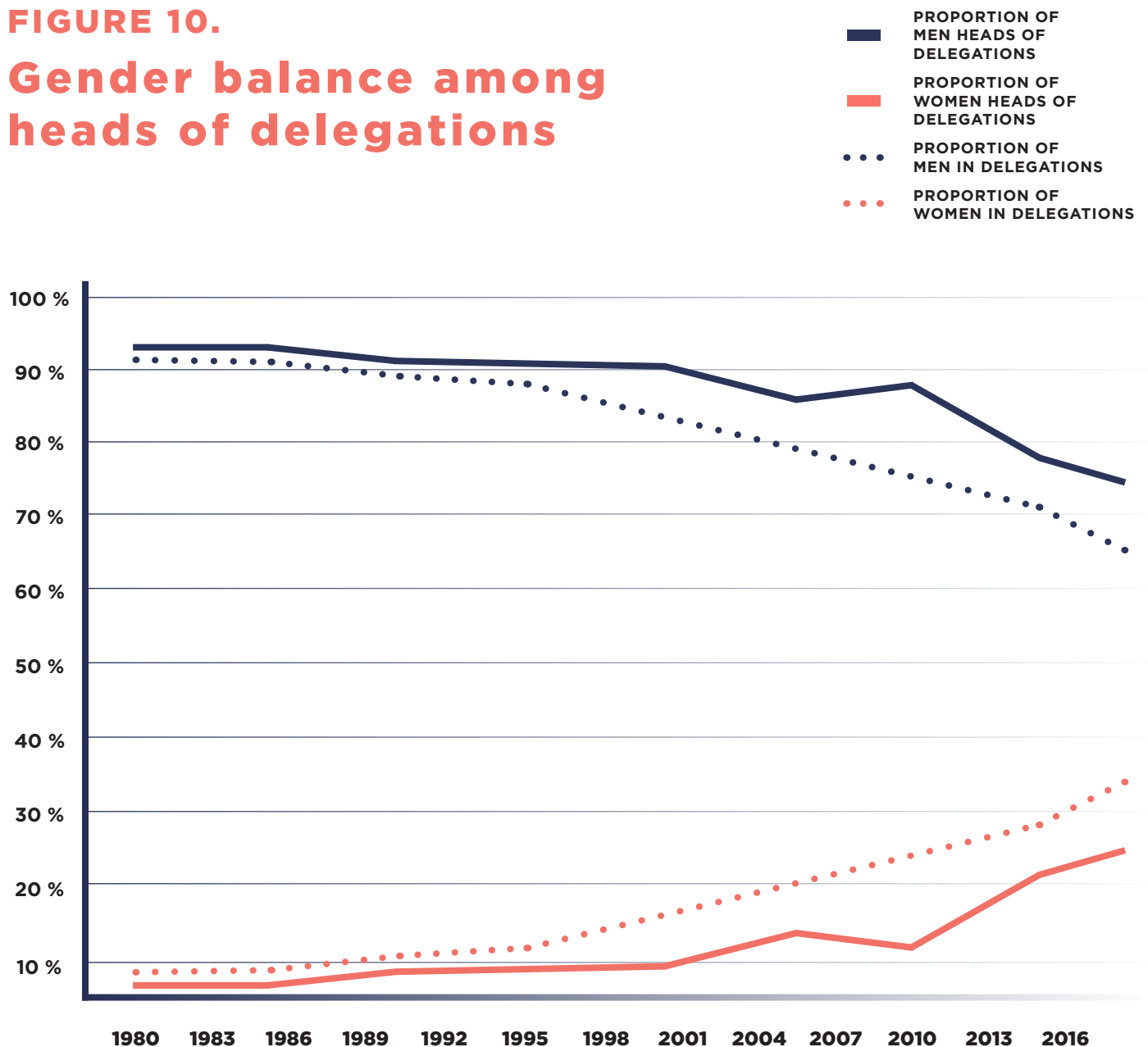
Returning to the field of disarmament diplomacy, figure 10 compares the gender balance of First Committee, the NPT review process and the Conference on Disarmament since 1980 with the proportion of men and women heading delegations at those meetings. The proportion of male heads of delegation was consistently higher than the proportion of male representatives overall for every single meeting or session

27 R.D. Putnam, *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*, Prentice-Hall, 1976.

28 The data related to United Nations ambassadors and members of delegations was obtained from the 2018 United Nations Blue Book. The source of information on foreign ministers and heads of State or Government is the United Nations Protocol and Liaison Service public list, <https://protocol.un.org/dgacm/pls/site.nsf/HSNGNFA.xsp>.

**FIGURE 10.**

## Gender balance among heads of delegations



coded for this study (a total of 84). The opposite is true for women, who are underrepresented in leadership positions, always at a rate below the overall proportion of women delegates.

Figure 10 shows that, although the gap between men and women has decreased over the past four decades, the overall pattern did not change. In 2018, for instance, 76 per cent of heads of delegations participating in First Committee, the Conference on Disarmament and the NPT PrepCom

were men – above the 66 per cent overall proportion of men delegates. In contrast, 24 per cent of heads of delegations attending those meetings were women – below the 34 per cent overall proportion of women delegates.

One possible effect of the over-representation of men among heads of delegations is that women have fewer opportunities to speak during meetings. Data from First Committee in 2018 shows that 27 per cent of statements at the general and thematic debates

were delivered by women, a proportion nearly identical to that of women heads of delegation at that same meeting (26 per cent).<sup>29</sup>

Research into ambassadorial appointments has found an association between gender and prestige, pointing out that men tend to end up in high-status ambassadorships.<sup>30</sup> Applying similar reasoning, figure 11 compares the proportion of women leading delegations to ‘low-profile’ NPT meetings (Preparatory Committees, or PrepComs) to the proportion of women heading delegations at ‘high-profile’ NPT meetings (five-yearly Review Conferences, or RevCons).

Keeping in mind the overall trend towards greater participation of women, it would be reasonable to expect that the proportion of women leading delegations to an NPT meeting would be higher in 2000 than in 1999, higher in 2005 than in 2004, etc. However, as shown by figure 11, the proportion of female heads of delegation has typically dropped at RevCons, the only exception being 2015. This may happen because RevCon delegations tend to

be led by foreign ministers instead of ambassadors – and women are even less represented at the ministerial level than ambassadorial level.<sup>31</sup>

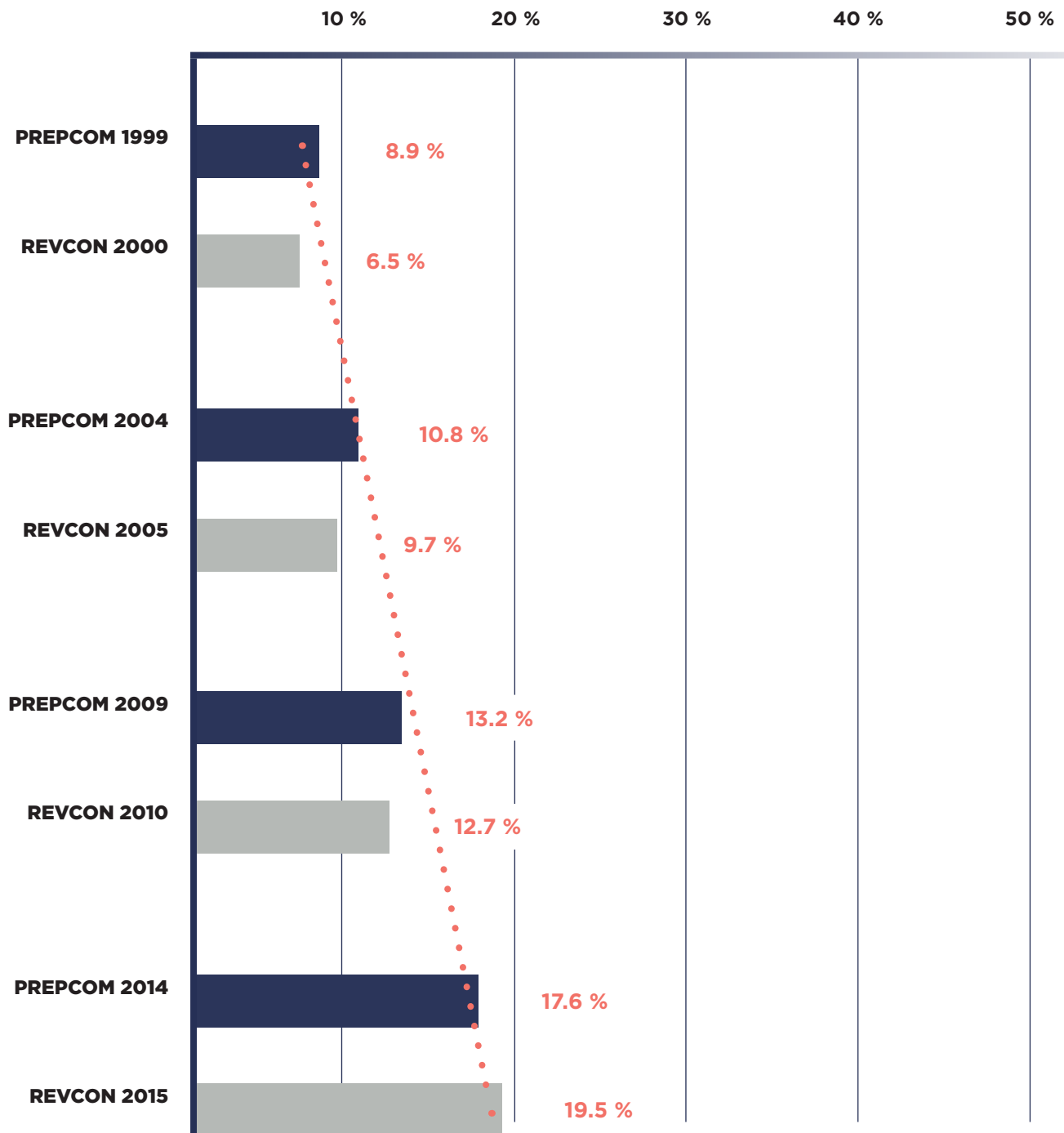
29 Statistics compiled by the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. Note that the overall proportion of women at the First Committee (2018) was 33% per cent.

30 A. Towns and B. Niklasson, “Gender, International Status, and Ambassador Appointments”, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2017.

31 Regarding the overall participation of women in NPT meetings, no clear pattern was found. While the overall proportion of women attending the NPT PrepCom in 1999 was higher than the proportion of women attending the RevCon in 2000, the relationship is reversed for 2009/2010 and 2014/2015. The proportions for 2004 and 2005 are nearly identical.

**FIGURE 11.**

# Proportion of women heads of delegations to NPT PrepComs and RevCons



## IN FOCUS

# Women's representation, visibility and influence in the negotiations on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

The negotiations leading to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) have been described as a process with strong engagement by women, who participated as diplomats, activists and survivors of nuclear detonations.<sup>32</sup> When it comes to numbers, however, the average proportion of women participating in those negotiations (31 per cent) and leading delegations (15 per cent) do not stand out from comparable meetings.

For example, the average proportion of women in First Committee delegations in the same year (2017) was 32 per cent (the number drops only 0.1 per cent if the comparison is confined to the 121 States that attended both the TPNW negotiations and the First Committee session). Regarding women as heads of delegations, the proportion for the TPNW negotiations was significantly below that of the General Assembly First Committee in 2017, which was 25 per cent.

Looking beyond the statistics, it is important to note that women occupied prominent positions in those negotiations: the chairperson was Costa Rican Ambassador Elayne Whyte Gómez, and women were among the

heads of delegations of some of the most active States in that setting (e.g. Ireland, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland and Thailand). As such, these women enjoyed greater levels of visibility and their voices were heard more than usual.

Women negotiators have typically been absent from historical accounts of multilateral or bilateral diplomatic efforts connected to curbing the nuclear arms race or promoting nuclear disarmament. With a few exceptions, there are no women among the main 'protagonists' of books on the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT), the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT), or the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

While some women were recognized as relevant negotiators during the Cold War (e.g. Swedish diplomats Alva Myrdal and Inga Thorsson), it was only in the 1990s that narratives on nuclear diplomacy included women in prominent positions, such as Ambassador Arundhati Ghose, who led the Indian delegation during the Comprehensive

32 See R. Acheson, "The Nuclear Ban and the Patriarchy: A Feminist Analysis of Opposition to Prohibiting Nuclear Weapons", *Critical Studies on Security*, 2018; B. Jenkins, "How a U.N. Treaty on Nuclear Weapons Makes International Security Policy More Inclusive", 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/07/12/how-a-u-n-treaty-on-nuclear-weapons-makes-international-security-policy-more-inclusive/>.

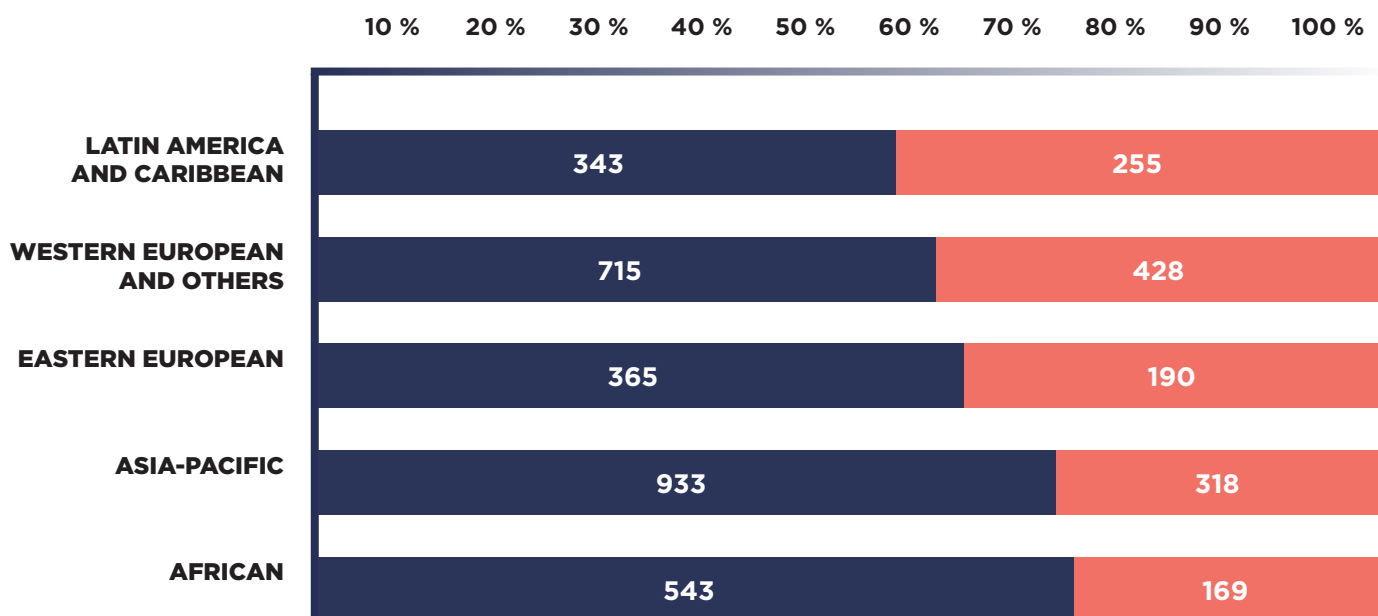
Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) negotiations. More recently, some of the teams that negotiated the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on the Iranian nuclear programme also featured women in relevant positions.

Seen in this broader, historical perspective, the TPNW negotiations are part of recent developments breaking the pattern of women's invisibility in nuclear weapons-related diplomacy. Moreover, the preamble of the Treaty recognizes the importance of "equal, full and effective participation of both women and men" for promoting peace and security, as well as the engagement of women in nuclear disarmament. Notably, this is the first nuclear weapons treaty to include this type of acknowledgement.

**FIGURE 12.**

## Delegation gender balance by regional group

■ MEN  
■ WOMEN



### e. Gender balance across regions and income groups

As one would expect, there is significant regional variation in the gender distribution of delegates to disarmament forums. In certain regions, most States' diplomatic services are completely dominated by men. In other places, women enjoy greater representation

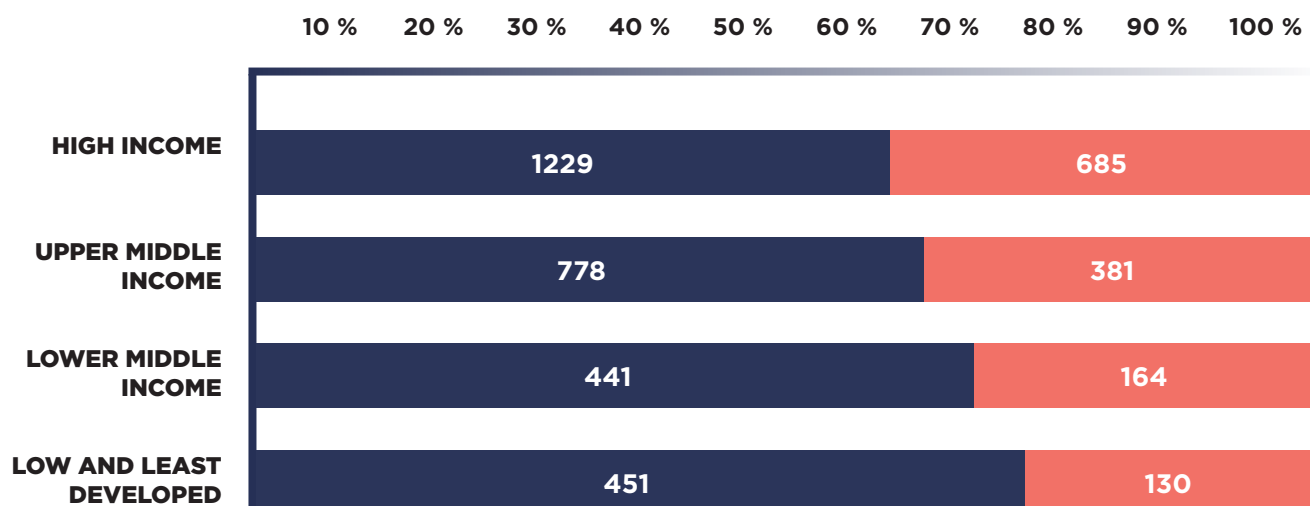
as career diplomats. Figure 12 breaks down the gender balance of delegations to large multilateral disarmament forums according to United Nations regional groups.<sup>33</sup> The Latin American and Caribbean Group and the Western European and Others Group have the highest proportions of women delegates. Delegations from the African Group and the Asia–Pacific Group tend to have lower proportions of women delegates.

<sup>33</sup> The numbers reported in figures 12 and 13 represent an average for delegations at the First Committee in 2018, the NPT PrepCom in 2018, the Biological Weapons Convention meeting of States Parties in 2018, the Convention on Cluster Munitions meeting of States Parties in 2018, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons Group of Governmental Experts on autonomous weapons in 2018, the Chemical Weapons Convention conference of States Parties in 2017, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons negotiations in 2017, and the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention meeting of States Parties in 2017. Although they do not officially belong to any UN regional group, for the purposes of figure 12, the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Niue and Palestine were coded as "Asia–Pacific Group". The Holy See, Israel, Turkey, and the United States were coded as "Western Europe and Others".

**FIGURE 13.**

## Delegation gender balance by income group

■ MEN  
■ WOMEN



The gender balance of delegations to disarmament diplomacy forums also varies across income groups.<sup>34</sup> Figure 13 breaks down the data used in figure 12 across income groups.

The graph shows that high-income States tend to send more balanced delegations than low-income States. This finding draws attention to a potential correlation between gender equality and economic growth, which has been the subject of extensive research. Various studies have indicated that improving women’s access to education,

jobs, health and political representation is likely to have a positive impact on economic growth.<sup>35</sup> Promoting gender equality is now generally recognized as an integral part of poverty reduction and development.<sup>36</sup> While commitment to gender equality is rooted in rights and justice, economic benefits can constitute additional arguments in favour of closing gender gaps.

34 The classification is based on Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, “DAC List of ODA Recipients”, 2017, [http://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/DAC\\_List\\_ODA\\_Recipients2014to2017\\_flows\\_En.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/DAC_List_ODA_Recipients2014to2017_flows_En.pdf).

35 For a review of relevant studies, see N. Kabeer and L. Natali, “Gender Equality and Economic Growth: Is There a Win–Win?”, *IDS Working Paper*, issue 417, 2013.

36 See, for instance, World Bank, *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development*, 2012, <https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2012/Resources/7778105-1299699968583/7786210-1315936222006/Complete-Report.pdf>; World Bank Group, *World Bank Group Gender Strategy (FY16-23): Gender Equality, Poverty Reduction and Inclusive Growth*, 2015, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/23425>.



## 2. UNDERSTANDING THE NUMBERS: VIEWS FROM DIPLOMATS ON GENDER IN DISARMAMENT DIPLOMACY

Sheer numbers do not tell the full story. To complement this quantitative analysis, UNIDIR conducted three focus group discussions with diplomats and disarmament stakeholders in New York, Geneva, and Vienna between October 2018 and February 2019. The objectives of these discussions were to present preliminary research findings, obtain perspectives from practitioners, and facilitate exchanges of views regarding gender diversity and women's participation and agency in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament forums.

Each focus group session included between 14 and 19 participants, most of which were diplomats working with arms control and disarmament. In total, 50 individuals attended the discussions, of which 60 per cent were women and 40 per cent were men. There were diplomats from 28 Member States and one intergovernmental organization, professionals from five international organizations, and four representatives of civil society and academia. The individuals were selected according to several criteria, including country of origin, gender, and experience with multilateral arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament diplomacy. More information about the design of the focus groups is presented in the appendix of the study.

All three meetings featured the same structure, including a brief, initial data presentation, followed by a semi-structured conversation on the challenges of achieving gender equality in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. After analysing the content of the three focus groups discussions, it was possible to identify key themes that were brought up by participants:

- the gendered world of diplomacy: 'soft' versus 'hard' portfolios;
- institutional and informal practices that sustain gendered hierarchies and divisions of labour; and
- the end goal of gender equality in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament.

These points are summarized and examined in the following sections. In view of the limited scope of the discussions, the following sections should not be considered an exhaustive analysis, but rather an exploratory overview of the linkages between socially constructed gender attributes and arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament diplomacy that emerged in the focus group discussions.

## **a. The gendered world of diplomacy: ‘soft’ versus ‘hard’ portfolios**

In all meetings, several participants shared their views that policy issues and settings associated with weapons and military affairs have traditionally been perceived as the domain of men. Noting that arms control and disarmament is considered as a ‘hard’ policy field, some people argued that this area of work has tended to reward characteristics, expertise, and experience that are more commonly associated with men (e.g. toughness, seriousness, risk-taking, and military training). To what extent these perceptions and institutionalized features have changed as more women enter the field was a subject of disagreement among respondents.

The lack of experience of military service was mentioned as a factor creating a distance between women and the materiality of weapons and the realities of military planning. On different occasions, diplomats talked about how discussions on non-proliferation, deterrence, and strategic doctrines can feel

abstract and distant, making it a difficult subject to relate to their own experiences if they have never worked in the military.

It was also noted that the language and terminology associated with weapons is something that can isolate the disarmament field from other policy domains, painting it as ‘exceptional’ and highly technical, and thereby discouraging broader engagement.<sup>37</sup> One diplomat drew attention to the gendered nature of this technical language, which includes terms such as “deep penetrator” and “erector launcher”.<sup>38</sup>

## **b. Institutional and informal practices that sustain gendered hierarchies and divisions of labour**

During the focus groups, participants talked about institutional, as well as informal, practices that sustain gendered hierarchies and divisions of labour. Some pointed out that diplomatic negotiations can run until late into the night

37 A recent study, which interviewed 23 women who have worked in nuclear arms control and nonproliferation in the United States, noted that abstract logic and specialized jargon can be used to “keep newcomers, especially those who are younger and female, out”. See H. Hurlbur et al., “The Consensual Straitjacket: Four Decades of Women in Nuclear Security”, *New America*, 2019, <https://www.newamerica.org/political-reform/reports/the-consensual-straitjacket-four-decades-of-women-in-nuclear-security/>

38 This language has been analysed by Carol Cohn as an expression of masculinity in international security; see C. Cohn, “Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals,” *Signs*, vol. 12, no. 4, 1987.

and, when this happens, it is possible to see some women leave early. As an explanation, participants noted that women tend to shoulder more household responsibilities than men. An unequal division of family tasks is not a product of diplomacy, but it may lead to women diplomats being held back in their career. Knowing that women often bear more unpaid household and care work than men, some recruiters may choose not to hire married women and/or those who have children. This point was raised during the discussions, when a diplomat mentioned this as an 'informal rule' in their foreign ministry's department dealing with international security.

The demands of diplomatic work jeopardizing work-life balance was a common topic in the discussions. Long meetings and travel requirements can take a toll on family life and relationships. As many pointed out, this is a problem that affects all multilateral practitioners. Therefore, finding ways to change the practice of diplomacy to better accommodate family life should not be regarded as a 'women's issue'. Nevertheless, a couple of participants stated that women can experience more barriers to travel abroad and, as a consequence, to advance in their career. Sometimes colleagues may advise against a trip if a given country is considered to be a hostile place for women. At other times, women themselves may choose not to take up a lengthy assignment out of their country of residence due to family reasons.

In all three sessions, diplomats talked about the importance of role models

and mentors who can support and encourage women to take steps to advance their career in a male-dominated environment. They brought up institutionalized programmes implemented by foreign services, as well as informal schemes. Participants stressed the importance of having senior professionals, both men and women, supporting the younger generation of women diplomats.

### **c. The end goal of gender equality in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament**

While participants generally agreed with the idea of equal opportunity in diplomatic careers, they had diverging views on the relevance of gender equality to arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament negotiations.

In every focus group, diplomats and practitioners asked whether negotiations and their outcomes would be different if more women were involved. While some seemed interested in looking for answers to this question, others were skeptical of any significant impact of socially constructed gender attributes in diplomacy. Arguing that diplomatic positions are a function of national interests and foreign policy decisions taken in capitals, this latter group portrayed diplomats as minor

players, as messengers and mediators rather than managers and policy producers. It should be noted that such claims have already been critically examined and refuted.<sup>39</sup>

Discussions oriented towards what would be the end goal of gender equality in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. Drawing on rights-based argument, several participants considered gender equality to be a goal in itself, affording women the right to participate and be represented accordingly. While acknowledging the relevance of this argument, some diplomats also saw the need to build a case for improving women's participation in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament initiatives, looking for evidence that could point to a positive impact of women in this field.

In principle, research studies could address these questions by examining negotiating styles through a gender lens, comparing how women and men contribute to negotiations and their outcomes. There have been studies

assessing the interplay between representation and output in peace agreements and it is plausible to assume that similar methodologies could be applied to arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament negotiations.<sup>40</sup>

There are challenges to this approach, though, including a lack of a culture of discussing gender perspectives among arms control practitioners. Moreover, as several participants noted, following this path may reinforce essentialist assumptions about women (and men). On this note, various participants rejected the stereotype of women as inherently peaceful, often mentioning the names of women who have supported armed conflicts.

A less controversial way of demonstrating the importance of improving women's participation is based on diversity theory.<sup>41</sup> Many respondents referred to studies which showed that a diverse composition of decision-making bodies can make group predictions more accurate and problem-solving more effective. According to this view, gender

39 Analyzing the work of diplomats, Adler-Nisson has argued against what she calls a “fiction of politically empty practice of delivering messages and exchanging views”, noting that diplomats not only represent national interests but construct them too. According to Adler-Nisson, ambassadors not only exchange views, they also help produce the positions of their nations. See R. Adler-Nisson, “Relationalism or Why Diplomats Find International Relations Theory Strange”, in I. Neumann, O. Sending and V. Pouliot, *Diplomacy and the Making of World Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 2015; R. Adler-Nisson, “Just Greasing the Wheels? Mediating Difference or the Evasion of Power and Responsibility in Diplomacy”, *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2015.

40 See M. O'Reilly, A. Ó Súilleabháin and T. Paffenholz, *Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes*, 2015, <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/IPI-E-pub-Reimagining-Peacemaking.pdf>; T. Paffenholz et al., *Making Women Count – Not Just Counting Women: Assessing Women's Inclusion and Influence on Peace Negotiations*, IPTI and UN Women, 2016, <http://www.inclusivepeace.org/sites/default/files/IPTI-UN-Women-Report-Making-Women-Count-60-Pages.pdf>.

41 Developed in the private sector, this theory states simply that teams with a diverse composition are more resilient and produce better outcomes; see, for instance, V. Hunt et al., *Delivering through Diversity*, McKinsey, 2018, [https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Business%20Functions/Organization/Our%20Insights/Delivering%20through%20diversity/Delivering-through-diversity\\_full-report.ashx](https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Business%20Functions/Organization/Our%20Insights/Delivering%20through%20diversity/Delivering-through-diversity_full-report.ashx)

diversity in multilateral bodies and negotiation processes could be a means to increase perspective diversity and enhance effectiveness.<sup>42</sup>

There were divergences regarding the value of efforts to increase the numerical representation of women in arms control forums. Some participants were against the establishment of quotas or targets, which they viewed as possibly tokenistic. Some suggested training courses to equip women to work in disarmament diplomacy, often stressing the need to get the 'right women' or else gender equality efforts would backfire. These comments suggest that there is still a perceived need to justify a woman's seat at the table in disarmament diplomacy.

Professionals from States that have established gender parity targets talked about the positive impacts of these directives. In their view, these top-down decisions made people more aware of gender imbalances and provided civil servants with practical guidelines to address asymmetries, leading to a better work environment for women and men.

42 See UNIDIR, *The Value of Diversity in Multilateral Disarmament Work*, 2008, <http://unidir.org/files/publications/pdfs/the-value-of-diversity-in-multilateral-disarmament-work-344.pdf>.

# 3. CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on extensive quantitative research, this study has sought to provide a systematic analysis of men and women's participation in multilateral disarmament diplomacy. Making use of focus groups with multilateral practitioners, this research also offered insights into the gendered world of diplomacy, contributing to advancing the conversation on women's meaningful participation in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament.

The findings indicate a clear trend of increased participation of women delegates in multilateral disarmament forums over the past four decades. Gendered patterns remain, as women are less likely to cover security-related topics than humanitarian affairs, for example. Moreover, leadership positions continue to be dominated by men, who predominantly serve as heads of delegation.

When shown these numbers, multilateral practitioners offered differing views on the likely causes of women's under-representation in this field and the potential benefits of greater gender diversity. Factors highlighted by several of the diplomats consulted were the perceived binary hierarchies between male–female and hard–soft policy issues, the military nature of the subject matter, work-life balance, and institutional and informal practices that sustain gendered hierarchies and divisions of labour.

Notably, there seemed to be a lack of awareness of the relevance of gender equality to arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament measures. Not all participants share the view of gender equality as a prerequisite to progress on every front. In effect, many would like to see a stronger case for including women's voices specifically in disarmament diplomacy. In this sense, it would appear that the standard approach of listing general advantages of gender equality – that it brings new perspectives and solutions to the table or unlocks greater resources – is not enough for this audience. This is in part explained by a relative lack of a culture among arms control practitioners of discussing gender perspectives, as well as a research gap on the interplay between women's meaningful participation and policy outputs in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament.

Future research efforts could address this gap by examining diplomatic practice through a gender lens, investigating if women and men lead distinctively in disarmament diplomacy. If so, it would also be important to understand whether and how diplomatic practice is being reshaped by women's increased participation. Similar studies have been conducted in relation to peace negotiations and conflict mediation, revealing correlations between women's participation and the durability of a peace agreement or between women's

influence and the inclusion of gender provisions in peace agreements.<sup>43</sup>

Additionally, some diplomats seemed reluctant to discuss the impact of socially constructed gender roles in negotiations, downplaying the relevance of gendered attributes in diplomacy. These diplomats portrayed themselves not as autonomous agents but rather as messengers, who deliver instructions developed in capitals. It is important to critically examine these accounts. As other scholars have already demonstrated, diplomats not only represent national interests but construct them too.<sup>44</sup> This observation, however, does not invalidate the role that diplomats, bureaucrats and decision makers placed in national capitals play in the making of foreign policy. In effect, it seems reasonable to propose as an avenue for future research a gender analysis focused also on the people who are shaping disarmament policy and issuing instructions in national capitals.

Another point made in this study that deserves further analysis is the regional variation of gender distribution of delegations. Studies with a regional focus are welcome, as they may be able to capture regional dynamics and how they affect patterns and trends across the globe.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that greater participation alone is inefficient in reducing gender inequality unless women can meaningfully influence decision-making, and unless there is an appreciation among multilateral practitioners for the ways in which the substantive issues they deal with are often gendered.<sup>45</sup> Further research is needed to examine possible ways of systematically including gender analysis and gender-responsive provisions in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament treaties. Such research would also seek to understand the value and assess the impact of gender-related clauses that have already been included in arms control and disarmament agreements, for instance the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Arms Trade Treaty.

43 See footnote 30.

44 See footnote 29.

45 This point was made by the International Gender Champions Disarmament Impact Group, *Gender & Disarmament Resource Pack for multilateral practitioners*, 2019, <http://www.unidir.org/files/publications/pdfs/gender-disarmament-resource-pack-en-735.pdf>.

# APPENDIX. NOTE ON SOURCES AND METHODS

## Quantitative analysis

The data used in this study has been gathered from open sources. The data on gender balance of meetings are based on official lists of participation provided by the relevant secretariats. The analysis of the data was based on the total number of women and men in each delegation, and the gender of the head of the delegation. In case the participant lists contained several individuals named as the head of a delegation or representative, the person listed first was determined as the head of the delegation. The representatives listed with non-gendered titles such as Doctor or General had their gender verified from other sources.

It is important to note that these lists do not purport to reflect the actual presence of the person in the room at the concerned meeting, nor do they necessarily contain the names of all the individuals that attended. Some delegates may have participated without registration, and some States seem to routinely pre-register more delegates than will attend the meeting in the end.

Despite these limitations, the lists of participants provide an open and accessible source of information for identifying patterns in gender representation over longer periods of time. While there may be inaccuracies in the observations, there is little reason to believe that such inaccuracies would correlate with the gender balance.

The average numbers reported in figures 1, 2, 8 and 10 were calculated based on the sum of all the men and women represented at each meeting, then divided by the total number of meetings represented in the given figure. The trends illustrated in figures 4 and 5 are based on data collected in five-year intervals.

## Qualitative analysis

In October 2018 and January 2019, UNIDIR organized three half-day focus group discussions in New York, Geneva, and Vienna. The objectives of these meetings were to present the preliminary findings of this research and to explore the depth and nuances of opinions regarding the topics of gender diversity and women's participation and agency in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament forums.

All three meetings followed the same structure, featuring a brief, initial data presentation, followed by a semi-structured conversation on the challenges of achieving gender equality in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament.

Participants were selected by the research team taking into account country of origin, gender, experience with multilateral arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament diplomacy. The discussion observed the Chatham House Rule, according to which



participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of speakers may be revealed. Moreover, participants were encouraged to share their personal reflections, rather than official views.

Each focus group session included 14 to 19 participants, most being diplomats working in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. In total, 50 individuals attended the discussions, of which 60 per cent were women and 40 per cent were men.

City	Participants	Women	Men
NEW YORK	14	8	6
GENEVA	17	10	7
VIENNA	19	12	7

There were diplomats from 28 Member States and one intergovernmental organization (including 13 ambassadors), professionals from five international organizations, and four representatives of civil society and academia.

The 28 diplomatic missions covered all United Nations regional groups, as shown in the graph below. The complete list of States and institutions that sent representatives to the focus groups is reproduced subsequently.

**Member States:** Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Egypt, France, India, Ireland, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Namibia, Norway, Pakistan, Philippines, Russian Federation, Senegal, Slovenia, South Africa,

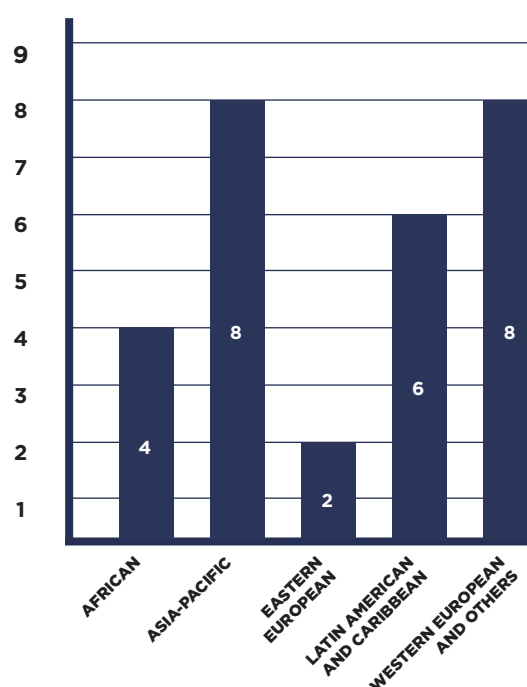
Sweden, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom.

**Intergovernmental Organization:** European Union.

**International Organizations and Secretariats:** Arms Trade Treaty Secretariat, Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization, International Atomic Energy Agency, Implementation Support Unit of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs.

**Civil Society and Academia:** Control Arms, James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.

### Participating States by regional group



*Still Behind the Curve* presents figures and analysis on gender balance in multilateral forums dealing with arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. Based on extensive quantitative analysis, this report shows that women diplomats are significantly underrepresented in multilateral forums dealing with weapons, nearly twenty years after the landmark Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

The report further analyses obstacles hindering the full and equal participation of women in disarmament and international security. Drawing on focus group discussions organized by UNIDIR Gender & Disarmament Programme, the study presents the views and reflections of diplomats on gendered patterns in the disarmament field.