



# Strengthening Women's Leadership in the WASH Sector in East Asia and the Pacific

## SUMMARY

Despite gains, women remain significantly underrepresented in the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector workforce, particularly at the highest levels. This same disparity is reflected in UNICEF's WASH staff globally, including in the East Asia and Pacific region. To increase women's employment and leadership in the WASH sector and within UNICEF offices, UNICEF launched the Women in WASH initiative in 2018. In East Asia and the Pacific, UNICEF has partnered with governments and other sector actors to assess and address the barriers that lead to the underemployment of women in WASH jobs.

## Introduction

Despite gains, women remain significantly underrepresented in the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector workforce, particularly at the highest levels. A World Bank report from 2019 found that, while the proportion of female water sector professionals had increased, the pace of change was far too slow to achieve gender parity.<sup>1</sup> The same study reported that the average share of female employees in water utilities was 17.7 per cent; research from the International Water Association and the US Agency for International Development in 2016 found that, in 15 countries studied, only 16.7 per cent of the water and sanitation workforce was female.<sup>2</sup>

Evidence from the private and public sector shows that higher diversity – in all dimensions – is correlated with better organizational outcomes, and therefore can be a competitive advantage and driver of growth. For example, a study found companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on their executive teams to be 21 per cent more likely to experience above-average profitability than companies in the fourth quartile. For ethnic and cultural diversity, the study found a 33 percent likelihood of outperformance. They attribute this correlation to improved access to talent, enhanced decision making and depth of consumer insight, and strengthened employee engagement.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> World Bank. 2019. Women in Water Utilities: Breaking Barriers. World Bank, Washington, DC. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/32319>

<sup>2</sup> IWA. 2016. The Untapped Resource: Gender and Diversity in the Water Workforce. [https://iwa-](https://iwa-network.org/publications/untapped-resource-gender-diversity-water-workforce/)

[network.org/publications/untapped-resource-gender-diversity-water-workforce/](https://iwa-network.org/publications/untapped-resource-gender-diversity-water-workforce/)

<sup>3</sup> McKinsey & Co (2017) Delivering through Diversity. Available online at <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Business%20Fu>

Eliminating the barriers to women's employment and career progression the WASH sector can increase the overall pool of talent for the sector, while bringing tremendous economic benefits to families and communities and advancing gender equality in society. The exclusion of women from the WASH sector labour force deprives the sector of qualified workers at a time when needs are increasing. The world is not on track to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6 of universal access to water and sanitation, and the shortage of skilled workers undermines progress. A 2014 study in ten countries showed a cumulative shortfall of 787,200 trained water and sanitation professionals to reach universal coverage; this included, for example, 82,600 additional technical field personnel in the Philippines and a need to increase the workforce by nine-fold in Papua New Guinea.<sup>4</sup>

A gender-equal WASH workforce can better respond to the needs and rights of women; children's rights and well-being are also more likely to be achieved when women's rights are protected.

The WASH sector gender gap is reflected in UN agencies, international NGOs, and multilateral development banks. A 2019 study by UNICEF showed that the proportion of women in non-administrative professional WASH roles in country offices from ten international development organizations ranged from 18 per cent to 45 per cent.<sup>5</sup> Organizations with higher proportions of staff in humanitarian response roles tended to have lower proportions of women. UNICEF was no exception: while UNICEF as an organization achieved overall gender parity in 2010, only 26 per cent of the 700 professional WASH staff were women in 2022. This workforce gap is compounded by a leadership gap, with women (particularly East Asians and Pacific Islanders) even less likely to be in managerial and senior

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<sup>4</sup> IWA, 2014. An Avoidable Crisis: WASH Human Resource Capacity Gaps in 15 Developing Economies.

professional roles. In 2019, only 12 per cent of WASH chief roles in UNICEF country offices were held by women, and all of these were at the lower grade level (P-4) with no women holding WASH chief roles at the higher grade level (P-5).

For UNICEF, increasing the number of female WASH professional staff and leaders has the potential to make the organization more effective in delivering on its mission for similar reasons: a bigger pool of talent, diverse and effective leadership, greater creativity, and additional depth of understanding of the communities that UNICEF serves. Diverse and accomplished female WASH staff representing UNICEF around the world has the potential to set a powerful example, particularly where social norms may prohibit women and girls from imagining such career paths are possible. Yet this can only be accomplished by making UNICEF a more attractive place to work and creating opportunities for women to assume leadership roles within UNICEF and the wider WASH sector.

## Strengthening gender equality in UNICEF's WASH section

### UNICEF's global Women in WASH Initiative

UNICEF's three Gender Action Plans (2014-2017, 2018-2021, and 2022-2025) committed all offices to achieve gender transformation in societies around the world through country level programmes, as well as gender transformation internally through workplace commitments. While UNICEF's global WASH section has strategies to achieve gender equality through development and humanitarian programmes, it lacked a dedicated focus on internal workplace issues to achieve gender equality within UNICEF WASH.

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF, 2019. Women in WASH: An issues paper. Available internally for UNICEF personnel [here](#).

In recognition of these gaps, UNICEF launched a global Women in WASH initiative in 2018 led by the global WASH section and the Division of Human Resources. The initiative aimed to realize the commitments that UNICEF had already made to gender parity, including the Secretary-General's System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity. The initiative carried out a study of the internal barriers and opportunities for women staff in UNICEF WASH, assessing five career stages and dimensions: recruitment, retention, advancement, representation and reputation. The study found a clear workforce gap, with inadequate numbers of women WASH professional staff and the systematic and chronic under-representation of women at senior levels. There was a poor distribution of female staff between regions and in-country, and chronic specialism gaps, such as fewer women recruited to water engineering roles. Low recruitment and retention meant that there were fewer women represented in UNICEF WASH throughout their career; women started to drop out or step back from their careers around the age of 40.

Women were less likely to retire from UNICEF WASH and more likely to resign for reasons such as lack of career progression or lower job satisfaction.<sup>6</sup>

In response, UNICEF's global WASH section working with the Division of Human Resources launched a series of activities specifically for women professionals in WASH, including networking opportunities and a coaching programme. Though not specific to the WASH sector, the Division of Human Resources launched temporary special measures in 2019 that gave preference to women in recruitment processes to reverse the decline in gender parity at the most senior technical staff grade level (P-5). The temporary special measures did modestly increase gender parity in the WASH workforce; the proportion of women in P-5 level WASH chief roles in country offices increased from zero in 2019 to three in 2022 out of 17 total positions.

#### BOX 1.

### UNICEF'S EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC WOMEN IN WASH INITIATIVE

*The objectives of the EAP UNICEF Women in WASH Initiative are to:*

- *Understand, influence, and institutionalize policies and practices towards achieving the goals of gender parity and gender equality within UNICEF EAP WASH community.*
- *Provide opportunities for women in UNICEF EAP WASH - at all levels - to develop, grow and contribute at the same level as men.*
- *Facilitate the participation, development, and promotion of women in EAP in the WASH sector, in turn improving the quality of engagement and collaboration through WASH programming with women, children and communities in line with UNICEF's mandate and goals.*
- *Raise awareness of gender parity and gender equality with UNICEF EAP WASH colleagues and the overall WASH sector and recommend actions to improve the situation.*

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF, 2019. Women in WASH: An issues paper. Available internally for UNICEF personnel [here](#).

## UNICEF's East Asia and Pacific Women in WASH Initiative

As the global initiative grew, it uncovered regional challenges and opportunities that warranted regional responses. UNICEF's East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO)<sup>7</sup> was the first to regionalize the approach with a regional East Asia and Pacific (EAP) Women in WASH Initiative in 2018, with a funded work plan from 2021-2023. The initiative was launched by the Regional WASH Adviser and Regional Director in EAPRO, signalling high levels of leadership and commitment.

Despite slightly better representation, women within UNICEF EAP WASH raised concerns about equal value and treatment across genders, grade levels and contract types. Within UNICEF, the EAP region had a greater proportion of women in WASH than any other region in the world (36 per cent in 2022), particularly in nationally recruited staff categories.<sup>8</sup> However, all country office section chiefs responsible for WASH are men.

Through surveys and interviews conducted in 2021, women cited stereotypes of East Asian and Pacific Islander women as submissive, meek, and lacking the ability to speak up or assume leadership roles as detrimental to career opportunities. Nearly all women had the goal of moving to a higher grade level as a next career step, while a third of women were actively applying for new opportunities. Yet women reported that they lacked mentorship and a clear understanding of what would be needed to gain a promotion as barriers to achieving their goals. Other barriers widely noted were lack of specific technical or managerial skills, limited international experience, and limited networks. For a few women, family considerations were noted as a major barrier, though this was not widespread,

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<sup>7</sup> UNICEF's East Asia and Pacific Regional Office supports UNICEF country offices in the following countries and territories: Cambodia, China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pacific Islands (Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Niue, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and

contrary to the perception of many managers that women were unwilling to take on higher level roles because they prioritized caregiving responsibilities or their spouse's careers over their own. Encouragingly, most women reported positive experiences working in UNICEF WASH, indicating that they had high job satisfaction in their current roles, felt valued and recognized within their office, and had confidence in their abilities to perform their job.

EAPRO designed the EAP Women in WASH Initiative to respond to the needs of women within UNICEF's WASH staff while also influencing the rest of the WASH sector towards gender-equal outcomes. Quotas and targets for the proportion of women staff by office was determined not to be possible due to incumbency and limited number of recruitments, so the focus was rather on dual outcomes of developing opportunities for women to advance and pursue meaningful careers in the sector and in UNICEF WASH and developing women's skills and competencies to succeed in opportunities as they arise.

In East Asia and Pacific, Women WASH staff within UNICEF requested greater support to develop their own careers and develop greater representation and leadership of women within the national WASH sectors where they worked. To support this, EAPRO designed a theory of change and series of activities from 2021 to 2023, targeted at both women and men, to mobilize UNICEF offices in support of gender equality in the WASH workforce.

Vanuatu), Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Viet Nam.

<sup>8</sup> Data includes staff on FT and TA contracts only. HQ and regions with fewer than 20 WASH staff excluded from this comparison. Including consultants, 36 of 93 UNICEF employees were women in 2022 (39 per cent).

## BOX 2.

### THE OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPORT THAT WOMEN WANT

*Through a survey circulated to all women working in WASH in UNICEF's East Asia and Pacific country offices in 2021, women ranked the support they needed to develop their competencies and careers. One activity stood out as the highest rated action by half of all respondents, which was on the job support and coaching to become a first-time manager.*

*The other actions that were ranked as highest priority or helpful by almost all women were:*

- *Stretch assignments in WASH in another country*
- *Leadership and management training*
- *Exposure to WASH sector events such as conferences or network meetings*
- *Opportunities for women to meet senior female colleagues (e.g., webinars, field missions, at conferences or events)*
- *Further technical training or study*
- *Mentoring from a more senior staff member*
- *Peer support from women of my same level UNICEF or in WASH sector*
- *Workplace policies that prioritize women's recruitment, retention and advancement*

*Additional broadly popular actions that women wanted EAPRO or their country office to offer were:*

- *Career counselling and regular information on job opportunities*
- *Coaching on the job application process and interviewing skills*
- *Management training for their current supervisor to drive workplace change towards women, review staff workloads, enable flexible working, and recognize and reward staff for their work*
- *Commitment of their office management to gender parity in the WASH sector*
- *Changes in workplace culture (norms and attitudes) to eliminate discriminatory attitudes towards women in the WASH sector*

*Informed by the survey responses, EAPRO developed an action plan for its Women in WASH Initiative for 2021-2023. Because the Division of Human Resources at both global and regional level already had specific programmes for job application support, career planning, coaching and mentoring, these programmes were not replicated but rather promoted amongst WASH staff, increasing their uptake (for example, 5 men and 9 women WASH staff members benefitted from the EAP Mentorship Programme from 2021-2023). Instead, EAPRO focused on the practical actions under its level of authority, such as leadership training, coaching, networking, exposure to more senior women professionals and mobilizing management commitment to gender parity.*

### Gendered leadership clinics for managers

Many women WASH staff in the EAP region requested management training for their supervisors to drive workplace change towards women, review staff workloads, enable flexible working, and recognize and reward staff for their work. To respond to this request, EAPRO organized clinics of gendered leadership to engage UNICEF EAP country office WASH section chiefs and other colleagues who supervise WASH staff (e.g., chiefs of field offices and deputy representatives) to secure commitment to workplace change.

EAPRO prioritized the 12 WASH section chiefs for engagement, all of whom were men. The purpose of the clinics, held in March and April 2022, was to provide deeper insights on gendered leadership development and better equip managers to support women staff members to develop their professional capabilities and career growth. The clinics were launched and promoted by the EAP Deputy Regional Director, signalling a high level of senior management commitment to the initiative.



The two clinics totalled five hours of training; only three WASH chiefs attended both clinics, demonstrating a low level of priority given to gender parity and women's leadership. The first session, 'Differing career paths for men and women over adult life phases and challenges faced by women professionals in WASH,' covered the topics of men's and women's differing career paths and life phases and the gendered leadership development approach. Of the 27 participants in this first session, only four were WASH chiefs. The second session, 'Developing leadership capabilities for women and managing gender dynamics in the workplace,' covered the rationale for developing women's leadership capabilities and workplace gender dynamics. As it was limited to managers, 13 staff joined (all men), comprised of six WASH chiefs and the rest chiefs of field office, deputy representatives and WASH specialists with supervisory responsibilities.

The discussion during the clinic showed that many managers needed to overcome their own beliefs and stereotypes and take greater accountability for creating gender-equal workplaces. Comments and questions from participants related to the broader systemic issues of the low level of women available in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields and the need for organization-wide actions which seemed to off-load responsibility to a higher level, rather than focusing on the factors that they as managers could control. Some managers noted the social demands on women in family care responsibilities and their perception that women were hesitant to take on higher level responsibilities. Overall, the discussion reflected a misperception that 'gender is a women's issue' or is being used for affirmative action to disadvantage men.

### Leadership training for UNICEF women WASH staff

The EAP women WASH staff surveyed in 2021 requested support to develop their leadership skills. To address this, EAPRO offered a virtual

gendered leadership training for women spread over two months in 2022, which aimed to address the root causes of attitudes and behaviours that underpin gender biases as well as hold back women from professional growth.

The gendered leadership development approach included understanding oneself, gender socialization, gender dynamics in the workplace, personality development and character building, emotional intelligence and charting the way forward for a personal and professional growth journey. The trainer provided practical and theoretical knowledge to guide self-reflection and small group conversations. The technique facilitated learning from peers experiencing similar challenges as well as bonding for future mutual support. A total of 12 women completed all 32 hours of training, which concluded with each participant preparing a personal development plan with six month and one-year milestones.

The training was held online due to lingering travel restrictions in the EAP region from the COVID-19 pandemic. The virtual mode was not ideal for the intensive and interactive approach: some participants lacked a private workspace allowing for personal and confidential conversations, while others were interrupted by colleagues or had poor internet connections. Participants recommended that future trainings be held in person over four consecutive days to benefit from dedicated and focused reflection and learning.

Despite these drawbacks, the resounding consensus was that the training provided insights about oneself and learn from others and more knowledge to strengthen own leadership capabilities to influence others. All but one participant agreed that the training helped to develop one's own potential and prepare to apply for career growth and define or refine own personal and career goals. In the evaluation, all participants recommended that the gendered leadership training be made available for other

women in WASH and a majority recommended it for men as well.

### Coaching for UNICEF women WASH staff

Following the gendered leadership training, seven women who completed the training received one-on-one coaching of up to eight hours to work on their personal development plans. The session took place over a period of three months in 2022. The approach garnered psychological and behavioural insights using probing open-ended questions, encouraging reflection and self-resolution towards the participants' goals.

At the end of the coaching, every participant prepared a road map to guide follow through and self-monitor progress to attain their development goals. All seven participants cited significant benefits from coaching and recommended that coaching be made available for others.

### Networking and virtual event series

Women in UNICEF EAP WASH wanted greater opportunities to meet other women and learn from other offices and organizations. To support this, EAPRO established an internal networking group using WhatsApp and email, and an internal and external event series with women from other countries, development agencies, and utilities.

The virtual event series aimed at greater awareness of the challenges facing women in the WASH workforce, as well as good practices from agencies with progress towards greater employee diversity. With internal events, UNICEF reached around 50 staff members from East Asia and the Pacific as well as South Asia sharing reflections on women's leadership from senior staff and managers.

EAPRO worked with the World Bank and the Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology Sydney to host a virtual event on practical actions to support women in the WASH workforce, reaching over 100 people in the sector. The co-hosting organizations shared resources to

support women working in the WASH sector, including the EqualAqua initiative of the World Bank and a toolkit published by the Institute for Sustainable Futures on creating inclusive WASH workplaces. Speakers from Melbourne Water, WaterAid Cambodia and the Women in Engineering Network of Timor-Leste shared good practices and outcomes of their work to create diverse and gender balanced WASH sectors. The events sparked reflection within UNICEF country teams and inspired connections between staff members in different offices to start similar initiatives, demonstrating the power of learning and exchange.

## Supporting gender equality in national WASH sectors

UNICEF staff reflect the national WASH sectors that they support, which are highly male dominated. Yet apart from few small assessments, limited information has been available on women's roles in the WASH workforce in the East Asia and Pacific region. In 2022 and 2023, UNICEF country offices in Indonesia, PNG, Timor-Leste, and Viet Nam initiatives to assess and support gender parity and women's leadership in national WASH sectors.

In **Viet Nam**, data from the Provincial Centres of Rural Water Supply and Sanitation in seven provinces showed that only 19.5 percent of their staff were women in 2021. To address this, UNICEF partnered with the National Centre for Rural Water Supply and Sanitation to strengthen women's leadership in the WASH sector. In 2022, UNICEF Viet Nam supported training on women's empowerment for around 40 women from government, the Viet Nam Women's Union and NGOs. Most of the women were in their 30s and 40s, ages where women are more likely to drop out of the workforce or step back from promotion opportunities. Inspired by the Women in Engineering Network in Timor-Leste, the participants in Viet Nam, created a similar network to strengthen professional connections and

increase experience exchanges about work and life. As a result of UNICEF's work, the National Centre for Rural Water Supply and Sanitation committed to three actions:

1. Review and develop enabling environment plans for women in the Centres of Rural Water Supply and Sanitation system, including a commitment that at least 25 per cent of leadership positions are filled by women in the next five years from a baseline of ten per cent in 2022
2. Develop and implement an annual capacity-building plan for women, including training, coaching, mentoring, on-the-job training
3. Develop and implement a plan for mainstreaming gender into WASH program so that we will not only look at leadership for women but have a broader vision of gender equality in the WASH sector.

UNICEF Viet Nam continues to support the National Centre for Rural Water Supply and Sanitation to achieve these actions as a part of UNICEF's annual work plan signed with the Government of Viet Nam.

In **Indonesia**, UNICEF and the Ministry of Health led a national assessment aimed at understanding the positions currently held by women, the barriers they face and opportunities to promote women's engagement and contributions to the sector. The assessment was undertaken in early 2022 and used both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, including field work in five districts. A total of 423 people were interviewed, and 42 consultations were held. The assessment found that the number of women working in WASH in the Indonesian Government Civil Service and in WASH sector organisations had steadily increased over the past years. Community-based roles in the health system are mostly occupied by women, but senior decision-makers in government are overwhelmingly male; across the civil service, only ten per cent of the top grade level of staff are female. Barriers to women taking up more senior roles in the WASH

sector included the gendered image of WASH being 'a man's job,' negative attitudes from male colleagues, gendered expectations that women will leave their careers after marriage, or fear of being assigned away from the family for field-based work. Some women leave the workforce to have children and find it difficult to re-enter, and this career disruption makes it more difficult for women to move into senior level positions.

In **Papua New Guinea** (PNG), UNICEF carried out a study in partnership with government and other WASH sector agencies to identify and understand the barriers to women's entry and participation in the WASH Sector in Papua New Guinea and recommend strategies to overcome these barriers. The study employed a mixed (quantitative and qualitative) methods social research approach and engaged with 68 different male and female respondents from a diverse set of WASH sector and educational organizations. While about 40 per cent of civil engineering students in the country are women, the study found that only 18 per cent of WASH sector professionals in PNG are women. Of these, less than a quarter have more than ten years of work experience, showing either a growing pipeline or high levels of attrition of women from the WASH workforce. Women cited lack of information about WASH sector jobs, family obligations and non-supportive family members, as well as the perceived physical nature of WASH sector work and the requirement to travel to remote locations as barriers to women's workforce participation in WASH. UNICEF PNG will support the establishment of a professional WASH women network, with the aim to effectively influence gender equality across policies and practices and to advocate for more opportunities for girls and women in the WASH sector and for women-friendly working spaces.

In **Timor-Leste**, UNICEF also carried out a study to assess the level of involvement of women in the WASH sector of Timor-Leste. The results will be available in the second half of 2024 and used



to inform future actions by UNICEF and other sector partners.

## Challenges and lessons learned

Internally, UNICEF's EAP Women in WASH initiative has resulted in greater leadership skills and competencies, great solidarity, and greater learning and networking for the women working in UNICEF WASH. Yet while the initiative has shown promising success in achieving its objective of developing new skills and competencies for UNICEF's women WASH staff, it is not sufficient on its own. More women in leadership requires creating opportunities for women's advancement in UNICEF WASH and ensuring that those in management across all offices are fully engaged and committed to this objective.

Despite high levels of management engagement and commitment by the East Asia and Pacific Regional Director and Deputy Regional Director as well as UNICEF Representatives in the region, change in workplace culture and in the proportion of UNICEF WASH staff who are women is slow. There is still a need to create and align incentives to recruit women, particularly amongst international staff, but UN-wide human resources policies and UNICEF accountability lines make this challenging.

All country office section chiefs with WASH programme accountability are men and have responsibilities in recruitment, supervision, and retention of women in WASH. Engaging these colleagues is a central factor to succeed in creating a more gender-equal and inclusive work environment. On the positive side, women with supportive managers were more likely to enrol in and complete development opportunities offered through the EAP Women in WASH initiative. Yet personal accounts from other women revealed that there is a degree of 'resentment' for 'affirmative action' for women which is seen as an 'unfair' competition in a tight upward mobility

context within UNICEF, both from their managers and their peers. There is a need to further engage male staff members as champions in culture change for gender equality.

During the leadership training, coaching, and mentoring, some women voiced low levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. In an environment where women are underrepresented and the work culture is perceived as male dominated, women in the sector need to strongly believe in themselves or risk being relegated to the background stuck in supportive roles. This calls for continued investment in women's leadership and personal development opportunities, while also empowering men to realize their own gender socialization impediments.

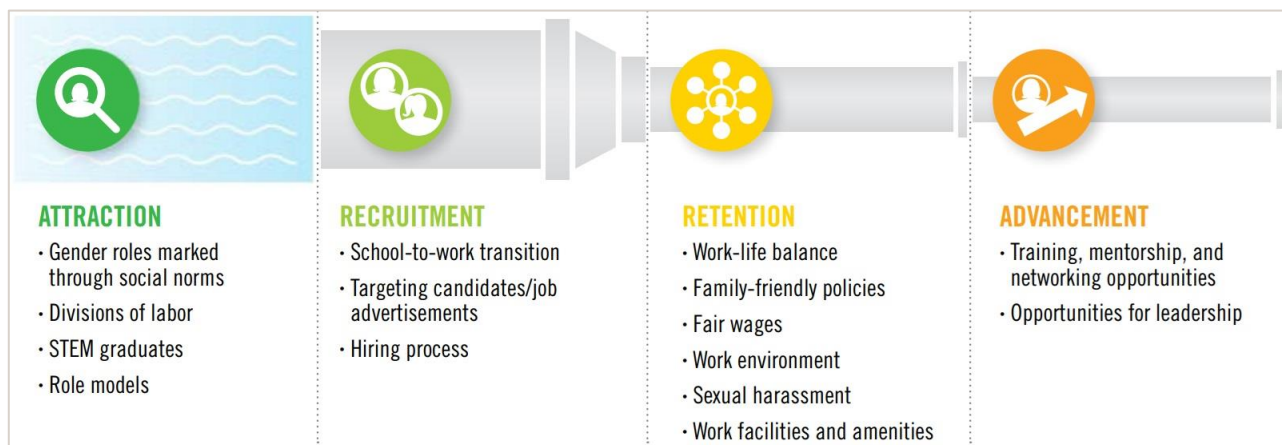
UNICEF's Women in WASH initiative benefits from other organizational efforts towards gender equality, including the work of the Culture and Diversity team in the Office of the Executive Director, and the Gender Push employee resource group. Both initiatives began in 2017 and have focused on addressing issues such as sexual harassment, harassment and abuse of authority in the workplace; flexible working arrangements; parental support programmes; disability and LGBTIQ+ inclusion; and racism and discrimination. Regular engagement and exchange with these colleagues – both formal and informal – has provided new ideas, solidarity and friendship for women in UNICEF's WASH functional area. Through these groups, experiences from the Women in WASH initiative have also been shared with women in ICT and women serving in hardship duty stations, two other areas where women are highly underrepresented in UNICEF.

Externally, initiatives aimed at influencing women's workforce participation in national WASH sectors is still nascent and needs dedicated attention and investment. In Indonesia and Vietnam, women represent only ten per cent of senior managers in the WASH sector; change will take years and require action from a broad

range of actors spanning educational institutions, utilities, government agencies, UN agencies and NGOs. The commitments made by the National

Centre for Rural Water Supply and Sanitation setting clear targets and timelines is an example of leadership that can enable changes.

**Figure 1: Employee career cycle in the utility sector**



Source: World Bank (2019)

The World Bank categorized the employee career cycle in water utilities as a ‘leaky pipeline’, with women facing barriers in attraction, recruitment, retention, and advancement to water sector jobs.<sup>9</sup> To attract more women to WASH sector jobs, utilities or WASH sector agencies can work with educational institutions to develop training programmes and outreach initiatives specifically targeting women. To retain women, agencies need to ensure women are protected and workplaces enforce antidiscrimination measures, while also adopting family-friendly policies and changing male-dominated workplace culture to be inclusive. Advancement is also complex, particularly as women are more likely to forego career opportunities due to gendered expectations of women as caregivers; however, workplaces can ensure that training and mentorship opportunities enrol equal numbers of women and men, and that succession planning moves the organization towards gender parity.

UNICEF’s work in national WASH sectors is mostly in the first phase of understanding the specific barriers that women face in different parts of the sector in each country context. The experiences so far show that uncovering these barriers can be done relatively quickly and with limited resources. Rather than planning an assessment only, country offices should be encouraged to plan for a few ‘quick win’ actions to generate momentum and show that the first steps of change are possible within a rapid timeframe.

## Next steps

Internally, UNICEF regional and country offices can continue to build momentum and focus on those actions that they can control directly, including strengthening management commitment, improving managerial accountability, and enabling women and men to learn and develop competencies in gendered leadership. The next phase of the EAP Women in WASH

<sup>9</sup> World Bank. 2019. Women in Water Utilities: Breaking Barriers. World Bank, Washington, DC. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/32319>

Initiative will give more attention to these areas, while continuing and expanding successful and popular activities like leadership training, coaching, mentoring, and networking.

To strengthen management engagement and commitment at all levels, EAPRO will further engage with senior management at country office level to build further support and strive to become a model region for gender parity in WASH. To increase visibility of the gender gap, EAPRO WASH will work with HR to monitor and regularly publish information on the gender balance on country office WASH teams in the region.

Men also need to develop skills and awareness in the gendered dimensions of leadership. Future trainings will be organized in-person as retreats for both men and women. Male managers will be targeted and encouraged to develop a greater appreciation of how gender socialization and expectations can strengthen their management performance in line with UNICEF's competency framework.

At the sector level, UNICEF can integrate gender and diversity as objectives in national capacity development plans and programmes in as UNICEF engages with governments and other sector actors in the EAP region to increase human resources and institutional capacity to achieve universal access to safe WASH services. Globally and in the region, capacity has emerged as one of the biggest gaps to achieve SDG 6; for this reason, capacity is one of the accelerators in the UN-Water SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework. UNICEF can also leverage its expertise in gender and social policy to ensure that national and subnational policies and regulations improve working conditions for women, for example through anti-discrimination and equal opportunity employment laws and family-friendly measures such as parental leave and childcare support.

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## About the Author

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## About the Series

UNICEF's water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) country teams work inclusively with governments, civil society partners and donors, to improve WASH services for children and adolescents, and the families and caregivers who support them. UNICEF works in over 100 countries worldwide to improve water and sanitation services, as well as basic hygiene practices. This publication is part of the UNICEF WASH Learning Series, designed to contribute to knowledge of good practice across UNICEF's WASH programming. In this series:

*Discussion Papers* explore the significance of new and emerging topics with limited evidence or understanding, and the options for action and further exploration.

*Fact Sheets* summarize the most important knowledge on a topic in few pages in the form of graphics, tables and bullet points, serving as a briefing for staff on a topical issue.

*Field Notes* share innovations in UNICEF's WASH programming, detailing its experiences implementing these innovations in the field.

*Guidelines* describe a specific methodology for WASH programming, research or evaluation, drawing on substantive evidence, and based on UNICEF's and partners' experiences in the field.

*Reference Guides* present systematic reviews on topics with a developed evidence base or they compile different case studies to indicate the range of experience associated with a specific topic.

*Technical Papers* present the result of more in-depth research and evaluations, advancing WASH knowledge and theory of change on a key topic.

*WASH Diaries* explore the personal dimensions of users of WASH services, and remind us why a good standard of water, sanitation and hygiene is important for all to enjoy. Through personal reflections, this series also offers an opportunity for tapping into the rich reservoir of tacit knowledge of UNICEF's WASH staff in bringing results for children.

*WASH Results* show with solid evidence how UNICEF is achieving the goals outlined in Country Programme Documents, Regional Organizational Management Plans, and the Global Strategic Plan or WASH Strategy, and contributes to our understanding of the WASH theory of change or theory of action.

*COVID-19 WASH Responses* compile lessons learned on UNICEF's COVID-19 response and how to ensure continuity of WASH services and supplies during and after the pandemic.

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