

[INTERVIEW: UN should be flagbearer when it comes to gender parity, stresses top official](#)

15 September 2017 – This week [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres launched a new strategy to achieve gender parity across the United Nations – something he described as “an urgent need, a moral duty, an operational necessity – and a personal priority.”

The System-wide [Strategy on Gender Parity](#) provides a roadmap to reach parity at the senior levels of leadership by 2021, and across the board by 2028. In particular, it covers targets and accountability; special measures; an enabling environment; senior appointments; and mission settings.

A key focus of the strategy is increasing the recruitment and advancement of women, in particular in the middle to senior management levels, where the gaps are the greatest and a glass-ceiling persists.

Leading this key element of the Secretary-General’s effort to create a modern Organization and workforce is his [Senior Adviser on Policy, Ana Maria Menéndez](#), a national of Spain who brings to the position more than 30 years of experience in diplomatic service involving bilateral, regional and global issues.

“This is not only about numbers, though numbers are very important,” Ms. Menendez said in an interview with *UN News*. “But it also has to do with being able to attract and retain and motivate women. It also has to do with special, temporary measures when situations need to be corrected because of this parity gap.”

The Special Adviser, who was appointed in June, also discussed why it is important for the UN to set an example in the area of gender parity, the vital role of Member States in advancing this goal, as well as other steps being taken in this area.

VIDEO: Secretary-General’s Senior Adviser on Policy, Ana Maria Menéndez, discusses the new strategy launched to achieve gender parity within the United Nations, and what needs to be done to achieve this goal.

UN News: The Secretary-General has, this week, released his strategy to achieve gender parity in the UN. Can you tell us a bit about this goal? Why is it important? Where the UN currently is? And how this strategy will make an impact?

Ana Maria Menéndez: As you know very well, the Secretary-General has established gender parity as a priority, ever since taking office in January. This is a very important issue for him, and to prove that he really means it,

this week we are presenting the gender parity strategy. The gender parity strategy is very important, not only because it is a right, but it's also going to have – I am sure – an impact on the effectiveness and credibility of the United Nations. I can say that, for example, at the beginning of this year, for 2017, the situation in the system was that there were 50 per cent women at Professional levels that can be considered the beginning of one's career – that is to say P1, P2. But when you went into senior positions, there were only 29 per cent women. So you see that the higher the grade, the larger the parity gap.

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Obviously, another problem is that if you go into the middle levels, you notice that for women it is very difficult to be promoted from the level of P3 to D1, D2, ASG, USG levels. So we have this situation, and it is really necessary to work on it so that the situation is reversed and corrected. The Secretary-General has appointed to the Senior Management Group, 17 women and 15 men. That's getting very much closer to parity, but [there is] still, of course, a long way to go.

I must say also that the gender parity strategy is very specific. There are plenty of recommendations with a lot of concrete and specific measures that are going to be put into place. This is important because parity has been a long-standing goal of the Organization but we never reached it. Perhaps because we were not able to take these specific measures in a structured and coherent way – such as we have now in the gender parity strategy.

And this is not only about numbers, although numbers are very important. But it also has to do with being able to attract and retain and motivate women. It also has to do with special, temporary measures when situations need to be corrected because of this parity gap. It also has to do with creating an enabling environment because there is a cultural aspect to it. And we also need a cultural shift. So as I said, I think this time we have targets that are bold but are realistic – that parity at the senior level should be reached in 2021. In most of the [UN] system, [parity] should be reached by 2026, and there will be a few outliers that will go until 2028. That is the ultimate target.



Secretary-General António Guterres (centre) meets with the Group of Friends for Gender Parity in March 2017 at UN Headquarters. UN Photo/Mark Garten

UN News: Does the UN have a particular role to play in achieving gender parity?

Ana Maria Menéndez: Indeed, it has a role to play because, as you know very well, the UN, among other things, is a standard-setting Organization. So it is very important that we lead by example, that we enact the principles that we stand for, and that we serve the peoples of the world. So this is very

important. Of course, I have to say that many Member States have implemented measures and they are closer to parity, and many CEOs are also working to close the parity gap at the level of corporations and private institutions. So we need to learn from them. And if we reach parity, I think that will be a good example for everybody. So I think it is mutually reinforcing, but certainly the United Nations should be the flagbearer of this.

UN News: What is the specific role of the Member States in supporting this strategy?

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Ana Maria Menéndez: Member States can really support us in a lot of ways, and we are already in dialogue with them, because we really need their help and they can contribute and they are eager to do it. I must say that there is a lot of enthusiasm for this strategy. I can perhaps give you a few examples of how they can work with us. For example, they can put forward names for senior managers, names of women. They can also contribute with campaigns, both to disseminate strategies and to try to recruit more personnel, more women in those areas that lag a little bit behind – for instance, the peace operations, especially in the field.

They can also provide some donor support. It is not that we are asking for a lot of money, but it will help if we can have some financial support for some measures, especially at the beginning, that need to be [used for] modernizing our system – human resources system – for tracking and monitoring. In general terms, be supportive. We have a Group of Friends for Gender Parity, which has 126 Member States, which is almost a record. We have also the Gender Champions network. So they can contribute a lot in a very substantive way.

UN News: The focus on parity has been described by the Secretary-General as a first step towards empowerment and equality by the UN. Can you tell us a bit more about any other efforts being undertaken to strengthen the UN's work on gender equality?

Ana Maria Menéndez: I think gender parity is of course part of a larger picture, which is gender equality. And [the] Secretary-General is of course very committed to the mainstreaming of gender equality across the system. The creation of UN Women is of course fundamental and essential to this. But by no means is it only UN Women who should be doing this work. It is really all of us; all entities have to contribute to this. I will also mention that there is of course Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goal 5. I think that mainstreaming this goal and working on this goal is very important, and gender equality is something that is cross-cutting and it's going to be present in all of the different strands of reforms that the Secretary-General is undertaking.