

An aerial, high-angle photograph of an audience seated in a lecture hall. The seats are red with wooden armrests. The audience members are mostly men, some are looking at laptops or papers. The lighting is dim, and the overall tone is professional and academic.

GENDER
REPRESENTATION OF
SPEAKERS AT UNWTO'S
EVENTS

• A R E S E A R C H B U L L E T I N •



IS UNWTO ACTUALLY WALKING THE TALK?

The United Nations World Tourism Organization or UNWTO is the leading international organization in the field of tourism. In 2010, UNWTO partnered with UN Women to publish the "Global Report on Women in Tourism", which showed a significant gender gap. UNWTO has now pledged through the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (UNSDG) No. 5 to have its member countries achieve gender equality and empower women in tourism.

This Research Bulletin features some highlights from our analysis of the gender representation of speakers at the tourism events held by UNWTO in 2017. The aim of this study was to establish a baseline that would serve as a benchmark for UNWTO to measure their improvement of the fifth UNSDG.

METHOD

In 2017, a total of 121 UNWTO events were held. Information on these events was featured on their website, and some of these events were video recorded and translated into multiple languages for wider dissemination. Of the 121 events, one was the Internationale Tourismus-Börse (ITB) Berlin, which is a significant international tourism trade fair, consisting of multiple concurrent events. For this reason, ITB Berlin was removed from the sample but eight of the associated UNWTO events held at the ITB were included. In addition, there were three parts to the 10th Working Group Meeting of the Convention on the Protection of Tourists and the Rights and Obligations of Tourism Service Providers, which were portrayed by UNWTO to be three separate events. Although there were web links to parts one and three, no information could be found on part two. The latter event is therefore removed from the sample, and therefore in total, 119 events were included in this study for investigation.

For each of the 119 events, we followed multiple leads for information on the dates, locations, event aims, event partners, number of speakers, gender of speakers, and distribution of speakers by gender and ethnicity. The primary leads for data are UNWTO's own webpages as well as the websites of their member states, affiliates and partners that document their past events. We also followed links to YouTube recordings of the events, Facebook pages and Twitter accounts but more often than not, these social media evidence acted as data triangulation rather than data for primary analysis.

Of the 119 events, only 64 had information available on their speakers, and these were what we analysed.

**CRITICAL FEMINIST
CONTENT ANALYSIS**

RESULTS HIGHLIGHTS



1656 SPEAKERS

1151 MALES (70%)

505 FEMALES (30%)

In total, 1656 speakers were identified from UNWTO website, as well as the websites of their member states, affiliates and partners.

Of these, there were 1151 or 70% male speaker engagements compared to only 505 or 30% female speaker engagements.



92%

MALES OUTNUMBERED FEMALES

in 59 of the 64 events

6%

FEMALES OUTNUMBERED MALES

in only 4 events

2%

BALANCED

Only 1 event saw a balanced representation
of male-female speakers



0%

**NO EVENT WAS FOUND WHERE
THERE WERE THREE TIMES MORE
FEMALE SPEAKERS THAN MALE.**

45%

**ON THE CONTRARY, IN 45% OF THE
EVENTS, MALE SPEAKERS
SUBSTANTIALLY OUTNUMBERED
FEMALE BY 300%**

RESPONSES FROM UNWTO EVENT ORGANIZERS

When approached for comments on the significant underrepresentation of women speakers at their events, one organiser who demonstrated empathy for the issue justified the overrepresentation of male speakers with meritocracy, and assuming the position that objective evaluations of the speakers were based primarily on expertise and recommendations from their partners, and not gender.

However, many studies have already shown that meritocratic practices do not result in objective evaluations because gendered norms would unconsciously bias merit measurements and prejudice who is considered merited or otherwise. While gender bias against female speakers may be “unconscious”, the same organiser, in the response to our concern, “consciously” acknowledged that the area of expertise featured in the event was male dominated.

Other UNWTO's event organisers appeared nonchalant about the concern raised and undertook an avoidance response strategy. To a large extent, these responses exemplify gender greenwashing* and statement culture*, which might result in the perception of UNWTO embodying organizational hypocrisy, that they exert more energy into appearing to be doing the right thing rather than actually striving to do it.



THE TERMS

- Statement culture is where diversity and gender equality are mainly exercised rhetorically through statements and slogans instead of actual practices.
- Greenwash is a prevalent word in the literature of sustainability that is used to describe communications that mislead people into adopting overly positive beliefs about an organization's environment performance, practices, or products.

UNWTO ON SOCIAL MEDIA



"I just came back from a conference organized by the world cultural tourism organization in Tokyo and it was the same. All male organizers, although Asians were included. It's quite disappointing that such a large international organization can't find any females..."

These are just examples of some of the comments we found on social media about UNWTO-events. Awareness for a gender-balanced panel is growing.

The findings of this study show that even for an organization that has pledged gender equality, there is a significant marginalisation of gender in the majority of their main business events in 2017. This gender blindness threatens the fifth UNSDG of gender equality and in particular, to provide women equal opportunities and representation in leadership roles, and further compounds the current patriarchal management of tourism knowledge production and policy making spaces. .



HUGE STEP FORWARD

Much more needs to be done to address the implicit bias and to bridge the official gender equality rhetoric of UNWTO and the management practices of their business events, through multi-level approaches.

For one, the people behind the committees tasked with organising these events need to know more about how to increase inclusivity that is visible not only for the delegates who attend them, but also to the populations who work for and with UNWTO, and those whom they aim to impact.

An inclusion-scoping checklist should be developed for use during event-planning, which incorporates common gender and ethnicity constraints with some recommended suggestions for resolving them. The Tourism Education Futures Initiative (TEFI)'s guidelines for promoting gender equity and balance in tourism conferences could be a starting point but can be further developed and implemented as a compulsory criteria set for any event to run.

It is recommended that UNWTO's event organisers develop some formal protocols to ensure that their events comprise equal representations of speakers. All UNWTO event organisers should at the very least understand the influence of implicit bias* on the notion of meritocracy, and look beyond traditional representations of expertise and recognition. For example, instead of recruiting all male speakers for a seminar on new technologies in tourism only because the technology industry is predominantly male-dominated, females working with innovative technologies in other industries connected to tourism could be engaged.

* implicit bias encompasses unconscious prejudice and attitude towards people with different social identities, such as gender and ethnicity. Research has found that implicit bias is deeply rooted in the social structures, cultures and organizations, and even the educated population adopts negative gender norms and unconsciously accept prejudicial social practices.

GENDER REPRESENTATION IN UNWTO EVENTS REPORT

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GOT ANY QUESTIONS?

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