



Chapter 5

Inclusion: recognizing
and celebrating diversity

Gender equality at UN Geneva

In recent years, UN Geneva has championed [gender equality](#); this work has been consolidated under the leadership of UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya, who joined the [International Gender Champions network](#) shortly after taking up her post.

UN Geneva is committed to attaining gender parity, particularly at the senior level, and promotes an inclusive and enabling working environment free from gender bias and discrimination. These efforts are supported by the Gender Steering Group, made up of senior managers, which regularly monitors progress and proposes relevant adjustments, and by the [UN Geneva Policy for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women 2016–2020](#). Due to the exceptional circumstances in 2020, the Policy was extended for another year, and will be reviewed and updated in 2021.

In 2020, UN Geneva continued to advance towards the goal of reaching gender parity, with women now holding 48% of posts in the professional and higher categories. In addition, UN Geneva introduced the [Code of Conduct to Prevent Harassment, including Sexual Harassment, at UN System Events](#) as part of a zero-tolerance approach to harassment. Launched in February at the beginning of the 43rd session of the [Human Rights Council](#), the Code of Conduct is designed to ensure that events are held in an

inclusive, respectful and safe environment. Information and copies of the Code of Conduct were shared with all relevant actors, banners were installed at key locations in the Palais des Nations, and a “Speak up” helpline was made available for those seeking confidential advice. This initiative has helped to raise awareness about the standards of conduct expected from all participants at UN system events and to provide support to victims and witnesses of harassment.

Scan the QR code to watch a video about UN Geneva’s work on gender equality.



Participants at the 43rd session of the Human Rights Council



Women are central to Strategic Heritage Plan construction and renovation

The women professionals who work on the [Strategic Heritage Plan](#) – one of the largest construction and renovation projects currently under way in Europe – are breaking through the glass ceiling in fields historically dominated by men.

On [International Women's Day](#), 8 March, the Strategic Heritage Plan team released its second article in a series on the women working on the project, many of whom are in leadership roles. Through these articles, the Strategic Heritage Plan team seeks to highlight the contribution that women make to projects such as these, profile the skills and backgrounds of specific women in the team, and inspire the next generation of women and girls.

“Our team is rather atypical, as it breaks the gender stereotypes still found in many teams working on a construction project. We are proud to be part of a team that illustrates the gender balance promoted by the United Nations through its Sustainable Development Goal 5.”

Chief of Design and Construction for the Strategic Heritage Plan, Véronique Neiss

Scan the QR code to read more about the role of women in the Strategic Heritage Plan project.



The Strategic Heritage Plan project owner, UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya, and many of the women who work on the project



Conference on Disarmament: discussions around the integration of gender perspectives

2020 saw two anniversaries of key milestones for gender equality: the 20th anniversary of the Security Council's landmark resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women and peace and security, and the 10th anniversary of General Assembly resolution [65/69](#) on women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

A key pillar of the Women, Peace and Security agenda is the meaningful and equal participation of women in decision-making processes. Despite repeated efforts, the participation of women in disarmament processes, particularly at senior levels, remains low. Out of the 65 heads of Member State delegations to the Conference on Disarmament this year, only 15 were women. To support evidence-based advocacy for the balanced participation of women and men in disarmament processes, the [United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs](#) tracks the participation rates and numbers of interventions by gender in the Conference for Disarmament as well as in the other disarmament meetings it supports.

This year, gender equality also featured in discussions at the Conference on Disarmament. Notably, the Argentine presidency of the Conference on Disarmament decided to hold its first formal plenary meeting, in March, on the integration of gender perspectives and of the Women, Peace and Security agenda into disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

Later in the year, the Australian presidency of the Conference on Disarmament proposed a technical update to the Conference's rules of procedure to render them gender-neutral. The Conference's rules of procedure, like those of many other disarmament bodies and conventions, refer to the President, the Secretary-General, Member State representatives and other roles using only male pronouns. The Australian proposal contended that the Conference's rules of procedure should reflect the reality that women have served as Presidents of the Conference and have been appointed as the Secretary-General of the Conference. The proposal enjoyed widespread support, but was ultimately not presented for adoption.

Such initiatives, whether taken by Member States or by the UN in support of its Member States, contribute positively to the promotion of gender equality in disarmament processes.

UN Geneva
Director-General and
Secretary-General of
the Conference on
Disarmament,
Tatiana Valovaya,
with the High
Representative for
Disarmament Affairs,
Izumi Nakamitsu



Women in disarmament: perspectives of the co-coordinator on improvised explosive devices under Amended Protocol II to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons

Stakeholders are increasingly calling for the active and full participation of women in decision-making processes and for the gendered impacts of weapons to be taken into consideration, in the field of international security and disarmament.

In recognition of the fact that diverse stakeholders bring new perspectives to the discussions, help find sustainable solutions and improve needs assessment efforts, States parties to [Amended Protocol II to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons](#) agreed in 2019 that the mandate of the Amended Protocol II Group of Experts should “recognize the importance of a balanced involvement of women and men ... in support of its efforts to address the threats posed by improvised explosive devices”. Since then, the Group of Experts has achieved near gender parity in panel discussions and has incorporated the perspectives of women from a broad variety of professional backgrounds to help better understand how to address the threat from improvised explosive devices.

Diana Esperanza Castillo Castro, of Colombia, has served as co-coordinator on improvised explosive devices since 2018 and has strongly advocated for the consideration of gender by the Group of Experts. For her, “understanding that women, men, boys and girls are affected by these devices in diverse and unique manners remains imperative to establishing adequate responses to fight this threat”.

Ms. Castillo hopes that the Group of Experts will further its work with analysis of the gendered impacts of improvised explosive devices, and that the Group of Experts forum will allow States to share best practices on gender mainstreaming and gender-sensitive approaches successfully being included in national policies, in order to ensure effective, efficient and context-specific implementation in the future.



Diana Esperanza Castillo Castro, co-coordinator on improvised explosive devices, at the meeting of the Amended Protocol II Group of Experts, under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, in September 2020



A member of the African Union Mission in Somalia sweeps for unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive devices.

Removing barriers to disability inclusion at UN Geneva

UN Geneva recognizes the importance of diversity and inclusion, including diversity in ability, and we have been working to remove the barriers that prevent or inhibit the full participation by persons with disabilities in our work.

In 2020, in response to the [United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy](#), UN Geneva established a Disability Inclusion Team, with representatives from all divisions and services, and launched its own action plan to help drive local-level implementation of the Strategy. We made progress throughout the year towards achieving the goals set out in the action plan, some of which had to be adapted to respond to the challenges presented by COVID-19.

For example, with remote participation tools being used for meetings and events, UN Geneva developed new approaches to incorporate live captioning and sign language interpretation from remote locations into hybrid and virtual meetings. Accredited sign language interpreters worked from their homes, where they had created mini TV studios so they could simultaneously view the speaker, documents or captions, and their colleagues working in other locations. Backstage, the UN Geneva team merged the conference room and interpreters' video feeds, which went to UN Web TV and the platform used for the virtual meeting.

This year, the UN Geneva Disability Inclusion Team also compiled a new toolkit for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. It comprises practical guides, online tutorials, and guidelines on accessibility and disability inclusion topics, such as the Disability Inclusive Language Guidelines to help staff better use disability-inclusive language in oral and written communication.

UN Geneva remains committed to raising its standards and performance on disability inclusion, at the Palais des Nations and beyond.

Scan the QR code to watch International Sign interpretation during the Human Rights Council's annual panel discussion on the rights of indigenous peoples.



UN staff work to enable remote International Sign interpretation during the 45th session of the Human Rights Council.



Sign languages are for everyone!

Sign languages are for everyone! UN leaders shared this powerful message in International Sign to highlight the importance of sign languages while challenging others to do the same.

In recognition of International Day of Sign Languages, 23 September, UN Geneva coordinated with the World Federation of the Deaf for the Global Leaders' Challenge. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe and the United Nations Ombudsman, among others, responded to the challenge. They demonstrated the importance that the UN attaches to accessibility and sign languages, which is given expression to in the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities established that sign languages are equal to spoken languages. By taking part in this challenge, UN leaders helped raise awareness of the importance of sign languages and drew attention to the need for the full realization of the human rights of people who are deaf.

International Sign is frequently used at UN Geneva for accessible international meetings of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and panels of the Human Rights Council.

Scan the QR code to learn how to sign "Sign languages are for everyone!"



A sign language interpreter at the high-level segment of the 43rd session of the Human Rights Council on 25 February

World Braille Day

In recognition of the importance of Braille for people around the world who are blind or visually impaired, in 2018 the General Assembly proclaimed 4 January as World Braille Day. Braille is a means of literacy that not only is key to realizing all human rights but also allows inclusion and equal opportunities.

UN Geneva marked World Braille Day 2020 with an exhibition entitled *Please touch*, which opened on 6 January. Organized with the support of the Bibliothèque Braille Romande et livre parlé, of Geneva, the exhibition featured a selection of Braille books, alphabets and writing devices, giving an opportunity to experience and better understand this system of reading and writing. The UN Geneva Visitors' Service organized a tour of the Palais des Nations for people with visual impairments.

UN Geneva also finalized a standard operating procedure for Braille transcriptions, which provides instructions and guidance to all stakeholders involved in the Braille transcription service to ensure a clear delineation of responsibilities throughout the processing chain.



Visitors at the *Please touch* exhibition at the Palais des Nations

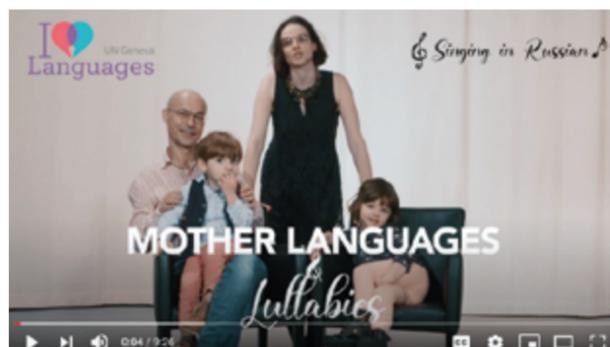
A visitor interacts with a display at the *Please touch* exhibition.

Expressing ourselves, in our mother language

Though it might not be the language we speak at work or at home to our children or our spouse, our mother language has been passed down to us through generations. It is found deep in our hearts and our minds and reminds us of who we are and where we come from.

For [International Mother Language Day](#) in February, Geneva-based UN staff shared stories, expressions and songs that were sung to them as children, and that they continue to sing to their own children, in their mother languages.

Scan the QR code to hear stories and songs in the mother languages of UN staff.



Celebrating the enrichment of the French language

In 2020, UN Geneva's plans to celebrate French Language Day on 20 March around a show dedicated to spelling were cancelled due to the COVID-19 lockdown that came into force a few days earlier. Instead, the celebrations were held virtually, with a video reminding us that the French language has been enriched by the contacts it has had with other languages and cultures throughout its history. In the video, which also notes the 50th anniversary of the International Organization of la Francophonie, staff members and delegates at UN Geneva explore some of these well-travelled French words.

Scan the QR code to watch the video celebrating French Language Day.



What does the English language mean to us?

Every 23 April, the UN celebrates [English Language Day](#), an opportunity to look into the particularities and intricacies of this lingua franca and reflect on the language that so many at UN Geneva use for work and personal interactions.

Staff celebrated in 2020 from their home offices, sharing anecdotes about their love of English and their favourite idioms. Their stories reveal how the English language impacts them personally, and ultimately, how it helps the Organization achieve its commitment to multilingualism, one of the priorities of UN Geneva.

Scan the QR code to see what the English language means to staff at UN Geneva.



Russian language: rich, emotional and full of life!

In a spectacular online celebration, leading theatres from across the Russian Federation observed [Russian Language Day](#) on 5 June this year with a linked series of theatrical performances in different genres. During the event, at which UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya delivered opening remarks, directors, actors and art producers shared their thoughts, as well as excerpts from stage shows based on works by famous classical and contemporary writers. The performances ranged from puppetry to ballet, and extended a cultural bridge to the rest of the world.

Scan the QR code to watch the entire Russian Language Day performance.



Spanish language festivities throughout Geneva

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, Spanish Language Day was not celebrated officially at the Palais des Nations this year. However, Palabras+, a cultural platform of translators and interpreters from UN Geneva, the World Trade Organization and the World Meteorological Organization, stepped in and ran a series of activities from 24 September to 14 October in Geneva to celebrate the Spanish language.

Many people put pen to paper and took part in the seventh “De la traducción a la creación” (“From translation to creation”) writing contest, the theme of which was “Juntos, pero no revueltos” (“United but not mixed”). Art and music featured prominently on the programme, which included a painting exhibition, a dinner with flamenco and a brunch with tango. Other activities were a tournament of mus (a card game), a family scavenger hunt around Geneva, an outdoor meditation session and a bread-baking workshop. Some lucky bystanders even enjoyed a sevillanas flashmob in a shopping centre.

Scan the QR code to see images from this year’s Spanish language celebrations.



Celebrating Arabic language and culture

Arabic Language Day was marked by UN Geneva on 18 December with a virtual programme to celebrate the Arabic language and culture. Activities included readings of the works of Syrian writer Zakaria Tamer and Iraqi poet Nazik al-Malaika, a presentation by Mauritanian poet Moulay Ali and a performance of Arabic music.

Scan the QR code to watch UN Geneva’s 2020 Arabic Language Day celebrations.



Honouring the translators of the past

As part of events to commemorate International Translation Day in September, Robert Dickinson, a staff member of the English Translation Section at UN Geneva, gave a talk for colleagues entitled “Translation at the League of Nations: a centenary celebration”.

Recalling the establishment of the League of Nations in Geneva in 1920, Mr. Dickinson paid tribute to the pioneering work of the League’s translators in promoting multilateralism through multilingualism and celebrated the enduring legacy of their work. He traced the history of the translation services from their beginnings in London in 1919 until the League’s last Assembly in Geneva in 1946,

focusing on the tireless efforts of translators to meet the changing needs of the League. He concluded by emphasizing the continuous thread linking the League’s translators with their modern-day counterparts in the United Nations.

League of Nations translators

