



PRIO Centre on
Gender, Peace
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The UN Security Council and Women's Full, Equal and Meaningful Participation

Data on invited briefers to Council deliberations, 2015–2021

Through the adoption of the UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, the UNSC decided to promote women's participation in efforts towards peace and security. But does the UNSC practice what it preaches? Are women invited to brief the UNSC to ensure women's "full, equal and meaningful" voice in regular UNSC deliberations? Moreover, who do such women represent and on what topics are they invited to brief? This policy brief presents new data on invited briefers, based on UNSC meeting records from 2015–2021. We conclude with additional issues for the UNSC to consider in brifer selection processes.

Brief Points

- Briefing the UNSC is by invitation only. Overall, 70% of all invited briefers were male. However, the proportion of male briefers declined from 77% in 2015 to 52% in 2021.
- Male briefers mainly represent the UN system or other multilateral organizations. When CSOs or government institutions are consulted, the briefers are more frequently women.
- Since the adoption of UNSCR 2242(2015), the number of briefers from CSOs (international, national, and women's CSOs) has increased.
- Women's CSOs are increasingly consulted on a broader array of topics. By 2021, the sixteen women's CSO briefers covered twelve topics, including 10 different country-specific meetings.

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Introduction

As articulated by the UN Secretary-General, over 20 years after the adoption of the first United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), women remain “largely excluded from rooms where decisions are made”. One could argue that one such important room is actually the UNSC chamber itself. Here, the UNSC can choose who to invite to present views and facts – i.e. brief – on specific topics. This raises critical questions as to whether the UNSC itself contributes to women’s “full, equal and meaningful” participation by inviting women to brief in regular UNSC deliberations and on what topics they are invited to present. Elected states to the UNSC, such as Ireland, Kenya, Mexico, Norway, South Africa, Spain, and Sweden have increasingly promoted the participation of women, including through the widening of consultations and achieving a gender balance among briefers. Building on new data compiled by reviewing official records from regular UNSC deliberations between 2015 and 2021, this policy brief assesses whether these efforts are succeeding.

As women do not constitute one coherent group, it is also central to ask who women represent when they have been invited to brief. In UNSCR 2242(2015), the Council in particular “[e]xpresses its intention to invite civil society, including women’s organizations, to brief the Council in country-specific considerations and relevant thematic areas”. This formulation stemmed, in part, out of a demand from women’s civil society organizations (CSOs) to be allowed to directly influence regular UNSC debates, such as those on Afghanistan, Iraq, or Somalia, where critical decisions affecting women were being made. Looking closer at developments in the period following the adoption of UNSCR 2242, this brief identifies improvements but also suggests additional issues for the UNSC to consider in brief selection processes.

Who Can Brief the UNSC?

Unless you are a UNSC member, speaking before the UNSC is by invitation only. This is a practice guided by the UNSC’s Provisional Rules of Procedure and conducted primarily through establishing consensus among UNSC members. Through Rule 39, the opportunity to brief the Council is extended from states to individuals, in effect opening the door

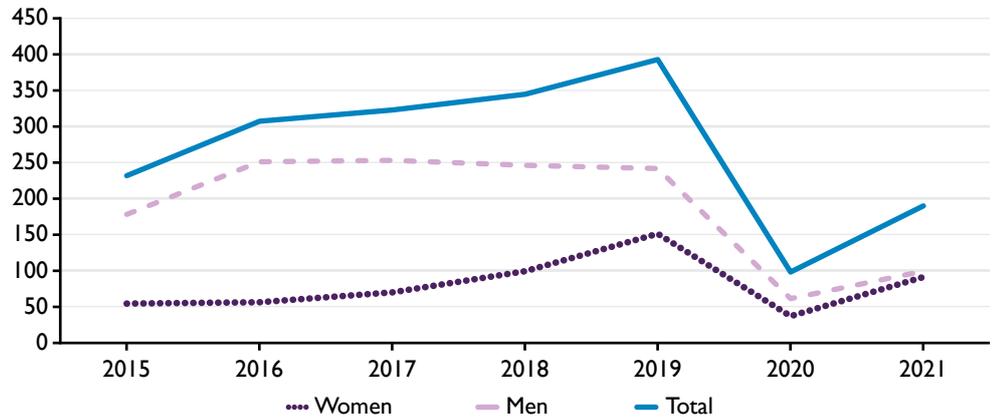


Figure 1: Number of women and men briefers, 2015–2021

to representatives from, for example, civil society organizations (CSOs). The UNSC practice regarding briefers has developed over time. During the entirety of the 1990s, only 117 briefers were invited. This was an almost completely male-dominated group, primarily representing the UN system or other regional organizations. The practice started to change in the early 2000s, when the number of invitees substantially increased. In this early period, women civil society briefers were primarily invited to speak at the yearly Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security. However, the Open Debate deliberations did not appear to fully affect the UNSC debates in the remaining 364 days of the year and demands were thus raised for women’s inclusion in regular deliberations.¹

Collecting Data on UNSC Briefers

By reviewing all published official records from regular UNSC meetings between 2015 and 2021, we have collected information on invited UNSC briefers, including meeting topic, briefers’ organizational affiliation, sex, and meeting date. As is visible in Figure 1, this information is generally available over time except for 2020, when the pandemic affected UNSC meeting performance and the publication of meeting records.² Hence, given the missing data issues regarding 2020, the information presented here can be understood as conservative, representing the minimum number of briefers but still providing us with interesting insights.

Does the UNSC Invite Women to Brief?

Briefing the UNSC during 2015–2021 could be classified as a male-dominated affair. 70% of

all recorded briefers were male. That said, there have been improvements over time – a development that has been part of an increase in the number of invited UNSC briefers overall. Until the pandemic in 2020, the number of briefers increased each year, from 232 in 2015 to 393 in 2019. If we include 2021 when the UNSC practices began to normalize after 2020, the proportion of male briefers declined to 52%. Hence, the UNSC could be on track to establish a more gender equal representation of briefers. That said, the absolute number of male briefers has remained relatively steady over time, even though the proportion has decreased.

Who Do the Women Briefers Represent?

Following research and policy on representation in deliberations on peace and security,³ we have divided the briefers into seven affiliation categories: UN system (from its agencies, operations, and organizations); Other multilateral organizations; Government institutions; International CSOs; National CSOs; Expert institutions; and Journalists.

In the published meeting records, briefers from the UN system represented 63% of all briefers. This dominance of the UN system is not surprising given that the UNSC seeks to coordinate its work with other UN organs and agencies, give mandates and directions to the UN secretariat and to peace operations through resolutions, and so forth. Of these briefers, 78% were men and 22% were women. This balance could be an effect of the dominance of senior male staff members, and could be positively affected over time by the UN Secretary-General’s Gender Parity Strategy.

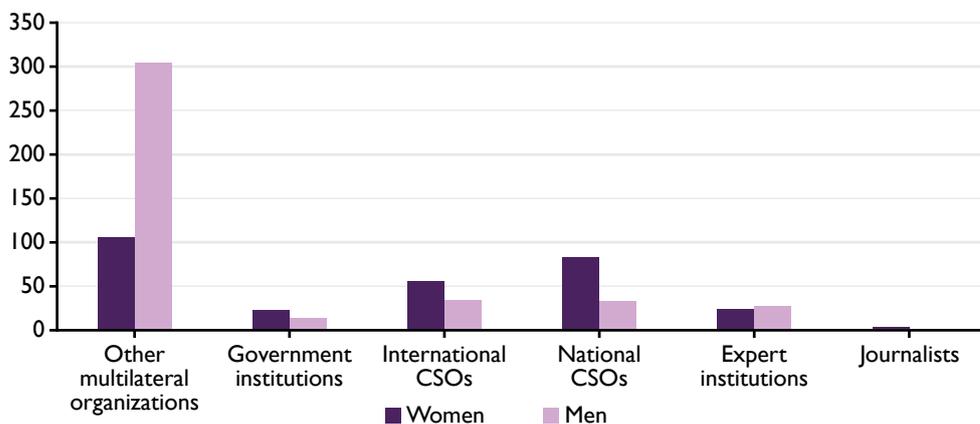


Figure 2: Number of external briefers by affiliation category and sex, 2015–2021

The practice of inviting external briefers has seen considerable development. In 2015, these external categories outside of the UN system constituted 29% of all briefers, but have in later years ranged between 31% and 43% per year. As can be seen in Figure 2, briefers from Other multilateral organizations is the largest category outside of the UN, constituting 22% of all briefers during 2015–2021.

The gender balance of the six external categories is likely affected by the gender equality awareness among the members of the UNSC when decisions are made on who to invite. As we can see in Figure 2, male briefers dominate among Other multilateral organizations, a category which includes organizations such as the African Union, the European Union, the International Criminal Court, the League of Arab States, the North Atlantic Treaty

Organization (NATO), and smaller multilateral organizations. Still, there is great variation. 96% of the briefers from the League of Arab States were men. In comparison, all of the briefers representing NATO have been women, most of whom have participated in the yearly Open Debate on WPS. The category Expert institutions is instead fairly evenly balanced; this category encapsulates briefers from policy institutes, universities, laboratories, private organizations, and law firms, among others. There are three categories which are more likely to see women briefers: Government institutions, International CSOs and National CSOs. As noted, the distribution of male and female briefers has seen progress, however, men and women briefers continue to be unevenly distributed across categories.

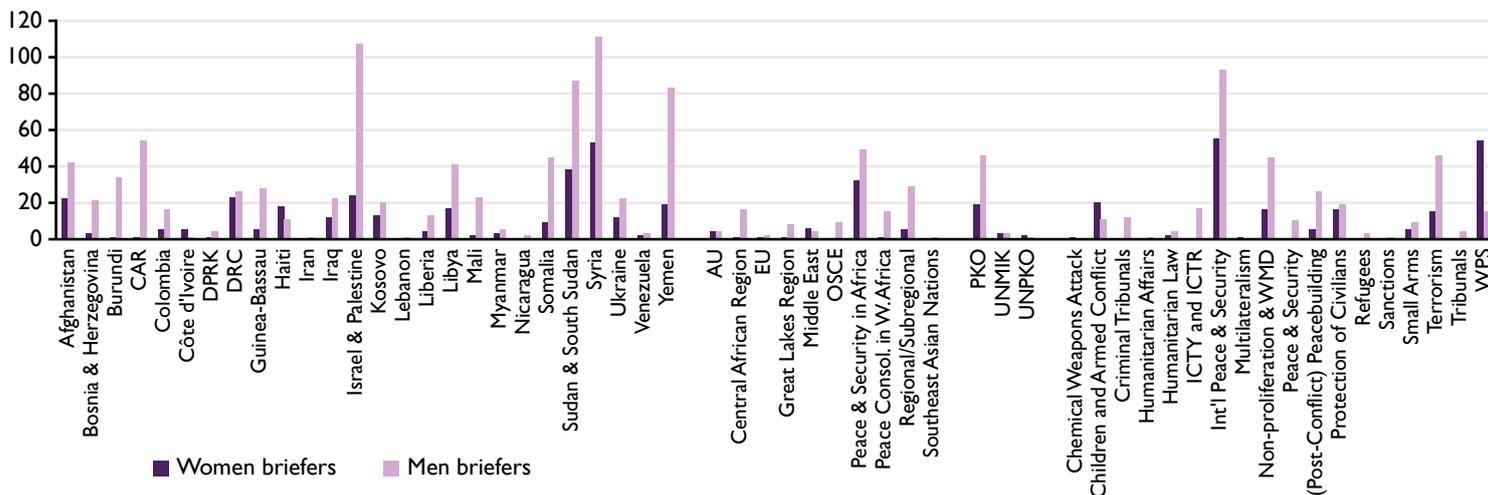


Figure 3: UNSC meeting topic by briefers' sex, 2015–2021

On What Topics Were Women Invited to Brief?

Briefers are invited by the UNSC to provide their insights at specific meetings. What topics women were consulted on is thereby important to study, as decisions on who to invite could be affected by stereotypical ideas of male and female competences and interests.

To obtain a picture of what women were consulted on, we coded the topic of each meeting as described by the UNSC. When meetings were titled “The Middle East” but the meeting record specified a country focus, we used that country as a meeting topic. Each briever appearance is then coded once by topic. Individuals may provide several briefings throughout the observation period; in these cases, a new entry is recorded for each briever appearance.

As shown in Figure 3, women briefers were consulted at least once on all but 12 topics. While this might give the appearance of women being well-represented in regular UNSC deliberations, it should be noted that several meetings may be held on a topic per year or over the entire 2015–2021 period. As Figure 3 further demonstrates, there is substantial variation in the balance of representation.

In all, women were consulted more frequently than men on eight topics: Chemical Weapons Attack; Children and Armed Conflict; Côte d'Ivoire; Haiti; the Middle East; Multilateralism; UNPKO; and finally, WPS, where no male briefers were consulted. Male briefers dominated

most other topics, such as deliberations on Israel/Palestine, Mali, and Sanctions.

Has the UNSC Improved on Inviting Women's CSOs?

Promoting women's representation is key for improving the UNSC's own contribution to realizing the resolutions on WPS. However, in order to ensure that women's rights and diverse interests are integrated into UNSC decisions, representation is not enough. Here, women's CSOs constitute one important actor. As noted, through UNSCR 2242(2015), the UNSC decided to more frequently invite civil society, including women's organizations, to brief the Council. We therefore created a subcategory in our data of CSOs called Women's CSOs, comprising organizations that have explicitly included promoting women's rights, interests, or participation in their mission statement.⁴ These can be both international CSOs, such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and national or sub-national CSOs, such as the Eve Organization for Women Development (South Sudan) or Municipal Association of Women (Colombia).

Our data demonstrates an important development over time. First, since 2015, the UNSC has invited an increasing number of CSO briefers. It heard from 140% more International CSOs in 2021 compared to 2015 (from 5 to 12) and 217% more National CSOs (from 6 to 19). If we look at the subcategory Women's CSOs from 2015–2021, they were consulted 50 times across the period; they were invited to brief on five occasions in 2015 versus on 16 occasions in 2021. In particular, briefers representing Women's national or sub-national CSOs have substantially increased from 1 in 2015 to 13 in 2021. While the proportion of Women's CSO briefers in 2021 is substantially better than it was in 2015, they still make up a small proportion of briefers overall.

On what topics were Women's CSOs then consulted? In 2015, four of the five Women's CSO briefers were invited to a WPS meeting. By comparison, in 2021 the 16 briefers covered 12 topics, including 10 different country-specific meetings. These included Afghanistan, Colombia, the DRC, Libya, and Mali. This is a notable improvement in line with UNSCR 2242's aim to better consult women's CSOs on country-specific issues, an aim prompted by the demands of women's CSOs and some elected member states.

Conclusions

When reviewing UNSC meeting records between 2015 and 2021, we find that male UNSC briefers have appeared before the UNSC 1,330 times compared to women briefers' 558 times. We found that women briefers most often represented a CSO or a government institution, whereas male briefers often came from the UN system or other multilateral organizations. Our review indicates that the UNSC is on its way to improving its representation as there has been a proportionate increase in women briefers over time, reaching close to a 50/50 balance in 2021. Important factors for continued progress include the follow-up of set strategic UN policy objectives on gender parity, continuous awareness of gender equality among UNSC member states, and continued pressure by women's CSOs on improved representation.

Moreover, the UNSC decision in 2015 under UNSCR 2242 to invite more women's CSOs to brief the Council appears to have contributed to realized progress. Furthermore, we see an improvement in the UNSC allowing women's organizations to voice their demands and insights directly in processes affecting conflict and post-conflict countries. This needs to be followed by the UNSC incorporating women's CSOs' concerns into UNSC decisions. Only then can the UNSC itself live up to the dictum of "full, equal

and meaningful" participation it has prescribed to national processes for peace and security. ■

Notes

1. Pablo Castillo Díaz (2021) 'Civil Society Briefers in the UNSC: Past, Present and Future'. Webinar presentation, Nordic Africa Institute. 9 November. (Email correspondence).
2. For example, in 2020, briefers were recorded in meeting records from January to March, July to October, and December. It is difficult to estimate how much information regarding briefers is missing as a result of this, especially considering the exceptional circumstances presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. For an easy overview, see: Desirée Nilsson & Isak Svensson (2021) 'Women, Peace and Security: Women's Organizations in Peace-Making'. Joint Brief Series: New Insights on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) for the Next Decade. Stockholm: Folke Bernadotte Academy, PRIO and UN Women; and Radhika Coomaraswamy (2015) *The Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*. New York: UN Women.
4. For an overview of this research approach, see Nilsson & Svensson 2021.

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THE PROJECT

The 'Tracking and analyzing WPS in the Security Council in real time' project studies WPS integration and implementation in the UNSC context between 2015 and 2021. The project is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

PRIO

The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) is a non-profit peace research institute (established in 1959) whose overarching purpose is to conduct research on the conditions for peaceful relations between states, groups and people. The institute is independent, international and interdisciplinary, and explores issues related to all facets of peace and conflict.