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Women in Diplomacy Index 2021

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AGDA Women in Diplomacy Index 2021

The importance of gender balance in the workforce has long been on the agenda of organizations in most countries around the world. The results have varied greatly, between different geographies and different sectors.

Diplomacy has traditionally lagged behind many other sectors when it comes to gender balance, especially in leading positions. This is despite the fact that most foreign services are recruiting an ever-larger number of female candidates at entry level positions.

The AGDA Women in Diplomacy Index 2021 maps the percentage of women ambassadors representing the countries of the 40 largest economies in the world, including the European Union (EU).¹ It focuses on ambassadorships in order to gauge the degree to which women assume some of the most prominent leadership positions in the world of diplomacy.²

The dataset is unique in its nature, building on a database of more than 4,000 ambassadorial appointments. It is our hope that by continuing to document the number of women ambassadors appointed, we can monitor progression over time and give ministries of foreign affairs (MFAs) a way to benchmark themselves against their peers.

The 2021 Index builds on a first survey, which was published in 2018 and contained an overview of the

ambassadorial appointments of all G20 states. By expanding the list of countries to 40 including the EU, the Index now covers the bulk of global ambassadorial appointments. In addition, the 2021 Index addresses the question of where these women are appointed to. Our findings indicate that progress since 2018 has indeed been made, with many countries appointing a larger number of women to top posts. Nonetheless, it remains clear that further progress needs to be made to make diplomacy a more gender inclusive field.

Results of the AGDA Women in Diplomacy Index 2021

Women remain underrepresented in ambassadorship positions across the world. Out of 4,060 ambassadors currently appointed in our sample (a number of posts were vacant at the time of data gathering), only 842 are women. This indicates that the total share of women ambassadors stands at 20.7% for 2021.

The data shows that Sweden takes the lead in having appointed the highest share of women ambassadors and permanent representatives in 2021, with 48.1% of the country's ambassadorial posts being held by women in 2021, or 50 women ambassadors out of 104. Canada's share of women ambassadors stands at a close 46.3% having appointed 44 women ambassadors out of 95 posts. Table 1 illustrates our findings from all 40 states, including the EU.

Table 1: Percentage Share of Women Ambassadors Across 40 Countries in 2021

Rank	Country	% of Women Ambassadors	No. of Ambassadors	No. of Women Ambassadors
1	Sweden	48.1%	104	50
2	Canada	46.3%	95	44
3	Norway	44.0%	75	33
4	Australia	40.2%	82	33
5	South Africa	39.1%	69	27
6	Ireland	37.8%	74	28
7	Netherlands	37.1%	116	43
8	United Kingdom	33.8%	154	52
9	Austria	33.7%	89	30
10	Philippines	32.1%	53	17
11	Thailand	31.7%	60	19
12	United States*	30.9%	136	42
13	Colombia	29.3%	58	17
14	Denmark	26.4%	72	19
15	Turkey	25.6%	129	33
16	Mexico	24.4%	78	19
17	European Union	23.4%	137	32
18	Switzerland	21.4%	98	21
19	France	21.2%	146	31
20	Poland	20.9%	91	19
21	Spain	20.3%	123	25
22	Malaysia*	19.0%	63	12
23	India	17.4%	121	21
24	Germany	17.2%	163	28
25	Nigeria	15.7%	70	11
26	Israel	15.6%	90	14
27	Argentina	14.9%	67	10

Rank	Country	% of Women Ambassadors	No. of Ambassadors	No. of Women Ambassadors
28	Bangladesh	14.5%	62	9
29	Singapore	13.7%	73	10
30	Italy	12.8%	133	17
31	Brazil	12.5%	128	16
32	Belgium	11.6%	86	10
33	Indonesia	11.1%	90	10
34	China	10.2%	176	18
35	UAE	7.9%	89	7
36	South Korea	4.9%	122	6
37	Japan	2.5%	157	4
38	Iran	2.4%	85	2
39	Saudi Arabia	2.1%	97	2
40	Russia	0.7%	149	1
	Total	20.7%	4060	842

* Indicates a large number of vacancies

Results Vary Significantly Between Regions

Our data finds that for the Nordic states in the sample (Denmark, Norway and Sweden), the percentage of women in ambassadorship positions is 40.6%, putting that part of the world at the top of the study. Oceania (represented only by Australia in this study) has a 40.2% percentage share, the highest percentage after the Nordic states. In North America (USA, Canada and Mexico), the percentage is 34.0%, with Canada appointing the highest number of women ambassadors, while in South America (Brazil, Argentina and Colombia), the percentage of women in ambassadorship positions is 17.0%.

In the European Union, the percentage of women ambassadors is 23.4%, while Europe as a whole reaches a 27.2% share. Africa represented in the study by South Africa and Nigeria has a close percentage which reaches 27.3%. The percentage of women in ambassadorship positions in the Asia region is 12.9%. Lastly, the

percentage for the Arab Gulf states in the sample (Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) stands at 4.8%.

Where Do They Go?

Turning to the question of where women ambassadors are appointed, the data shows that the United Nations in New York is the number one destination for women ambassadors. This is not surprising given the fact that the number of women ambassadors sent to a state or organization should be seen in the context of the total number of ambassadors, men or women, sent to that state or organization. Our findings also indicate that while there is a wide geographical distribution, European destinations appear to be the top recipients of women ambassadors, with 7 destinations out of 15 being in Europe. Table 2 shows the top recipients of women ambassadors sent from the 40 countries in our Index.

Table 2: Top 5 Destinations for Women Ambassadors in 2021

Rank	Receiving State / Organization	No. of Women Ambassadors Posted
1	United Nations, New York	12
2	Portugal	11
3	Denmark	10
3	Sweden	10
4	Thailand	9
4	Poland	9
4	Finland	9
4	Jordan	9
4	Vietnam	9
4	United States	9
5	Ghana	8
5	Nigeria	8
5	Italy	8
5	Morocco	8
5	United Nations, Geneva	8

As a group, the Nordic countries stand out in the sample with Denmark, Sweden and Finland appearing in the top-5 list. As previously noted, the Nordic countries are top *senders* of women ambassadors, with an average of 40.6% women ambassadors for the Nordics in the sample. The fact that they are also top *recipients* of women diplomats perhaps reflects the impression that sending a woman ambassador is a politically strong signal recognized by the receiving state. It might also reflect that these countries are generally considered family-friendly destinations.

An interesting question is the extent to which women ambassadors get the top ambassadorships. It is difficult to objectively measure what the “top ambassadorships” are. In most cases, some neighboring countries, especially large and powerful ones that dominate political and economic relations with the sending state, will enjoy a high degree of perceived weight in the ambassadorial pecking order that that same posting may not have for a country that is farther away. As a

proxy for top ambassadorships we use the G7 countries, which in almost all cases will be coveted postings given their global political and economic clout. It is noteworthy that only two G7 countries make it to the top 5 – the United States and Italy.

Have We Made Progress?

Overall, our findings show that progress has been made since 2018 with the majority of G20 countries appointing a larger number of women to top ambassadorial posts. Table 3 compares the 2018 percentage shares of women ambassadors with those of the 2021 Index.³ With a 10.7 percentage point difference between 2018 and 2021, our analysis finds that Canada has made significant progress and now takes first place amongst the G20 states. In relative terms, Italy has made the most progress, almost doubling the percentage of women ambassadors (from 6.9% to 12.8%).

Within the G20, women remain underrepresented in ambassadorship positions. Out of 2,429 ambassadors currently appointed, only 446 are women. This indicates that the total share of women ambassadors in the G20 stands at 18.4% for 2021. However, this is an improvement from 2018, where the overall weighted average of the G20 stood at 16.7%.

These advances, as well as those of non-G20 states, need to be recognized and efforts applauded. Nevertheless, with a mere 20.7 percentage share of the total ambassadorial posts for the 40 countries in our sample, the picture is clear: the world is still a long way away from ensuring gender equality in the top diplomatic posts.

Table 3: G20 Countries Percentage Share of Women Ambassadors in 2018 and 2021

Country	Rank 2018	2018 % Share of Women Ambassadors	Rank 2021	2021 % Share of Women Ambassadors	% Share Difference 2021 to 2018
Australia	1	36.0%	2	40.2%	+4.2%
Canada	2	35.6%	1	46.3%	+10.7%
USA*	3	33.1%	5	30.9%	-2.2%
South Africa	4	32.7%	3	39.1%	+6.4%
United Kingdom	5	28.8%	4	33.8%	+5.0%
France	6	26.5%	9	21.2%	-5.3%
European Union	7	25.9%	8	23.4%	-2.5%
Turkey	8	22.2%	6	25.6%	+3.4%
Mexico	9	18.4%	7	24.4%	+6.0%
Argentina	10	14.6%	12	14.9%	+0.3%
India	11	14.1%	10	17.4%	+3.3%
Germany	12	12.7%	11	17.2%	+4.5%
Brazil	13	10.1%	14	12.5%	+2.4%
Indonesia	14	9.9%	15	11.1%	+1.2%
Italy	15	6.9%	13	12.8%	+5.9%
China	16	6.7%	16	10.2%	+3.5%
South Korea	17	5.0%	17	4.9%	-0.1%
Japan	18	3.7%	18	2.5%	-1.2%
Russia	19	0.6%	20	0.7%	+0.1%
Saudi Arabia	20	0.0%	19	2.1%	+2.1%

*Indicates a large number of vacancies

Endnotes

1. The AGDA Women in Diplomacy Index of 2021 was compiled and authored by a team of three AGDA faculty - Ulrik Birk-Petersen, Dr. Sara Chehab and Sara Kazim - with the assistance of a team of six AGDA students: Khulood Jamal Adam, Ahmed Al Ameri, Fatma Al Banna, Fatima Al Hammadi, Salama Al Qubaisi and Hassan Al Suwaidi. Our sincere thanks go to the team of students for their invaluable efforts in producing this Index.
2. Methodology: To calculate the share of women ambassadors in the 40 countries, a survey was made of each country based on the following criteria:
 - The survey was limited to the 40 biggest economies in the world, including the European Union. Due to the size of their foreign services, these countries represent a large part of all ambassadorial nominations globally. The list of countries was identified using IMF data.
 - The total number of ambassadors was calculated by relying on data found on the various embassy websites of each country. Only on rare occasions, when embassy websites were either unavailable or clearly not up-to-date, were secondary sources used.
 - The total number of ambassadors includes active ambassadors and permanent representatives to international and regional organizations (and high commissioners in the case of Commonwealth states) with ambassadorial rank serving as heads of mission abroad.
 - The data count did not include consuls, consuls-general, deputy heads of mission with or without ambassadorial rank, chargés d'affaires, ambassadors-at-large for particular issues (e.g. nuclear proliferation, migration, etc.) or persons with ambassadorial rank serving in their national capital as opposed to serving as heads of a diplomatic mission abroad.
 - The data was gathered between 1 November and 15 December 2020.
3. The 2018 iteration of the Index only covered the countries of the G20, as well as the European Union.