

# A Case Study on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policies Developed by the World Maritime University for the Maritime Transport Sector

M.C. Romero Lares

*World Maritime University, Malmö, Sweden*

**ABSTRACT:** The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment has been a goal of the United Nations Organization and its specialized agencies, within each one's particular scope of competencies. The World Maritime University (WMU), a postgraduate maritime university founded by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), has put in place its own policies to promote the participation of women in the maritime transport sector. The main idea behind this case study analysis is to look at how WMU's policies on gender equality and women's empowerment have evolved over time; their impact on student and employee body, curriculum, conferences and seminars; and propose areas for improvement. This research is aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of an ongoing process by exploring enrolment and hiring statistics, documents and related articles over a period of 34 years (from 1983 to 2017).

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment has been a goal of the United Nations Organization and the UN specialized agencies, within each one's particular scope of competencies. During the so-called United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985), many specialized agencies of the UN sought to implement programmes to assure the advancement of women and to promote gender equality (Tansey, 2000).

This mandate was reinforced at the Beijing Conference, where the Platform for Action (PfA) called all Specialized Agencies and other organizations of the UN System to set out specific actions to meet the global priorities identified in the PfA and later by the inclusion of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3 and the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 to achieve gender equality and to empower all women (and girls).

The International Maritime Organization (IMO), the UN specialized agency in charge of promoting safe, secure, environmentally sound, efficient and sustainable shipping through cooperation, launched the IMO Women in Development Program (WID) in 1989, aimed at expanding women's capabilities in the maritime sector. The programme focused on equal access to maritime training through both mainstreaming programmes and gender specific projects (Tansey, 2000).

The program is called "SDG 5: Strengthening the maritime sector" nowadays, signaling the compromise of IMO with the post-2015 agenda and the SDGs. The main objective of the program is to facilitate access to high-level technical training for women maritime officials (IMO, 2016a).

One of the drivers of the IMO's gender programme has been the development and strengthening of formal regional associations of women in maritime around the globe and the way

forward is the future development of gender maritime education and training programme (GENMET), through the production of education and training material based on the principles of SDG 5's targets (IMO, 2016b; IMO, 2017).

The World Maritime University (WMU), a postgraduate maritime university founded by the IMO with the mandate to further enhance the role of the Organization, has developed and implemented its own policies to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment in the maritime transport sector.

The main idea behind this case study analysis is to look at how WMU's policies on gender equality and women's empowerment have evolved over time; their impact on student and employee body, curriculum, conferences and seminars; and propose areas for improvement. This research is aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of an ongoing process by exploring enrolment and hiring statistics, documents and related articles over a period of 34 years (from 1983 to 2017).

## 2 DEFINITIONS ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

The issues of gender equality and women's empowerment is at the top of agendas worldwide, as gender disparities in economic and political areas persist. According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), gender equality "refers to equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female" (UN Women, 2017).

Empowerment of women means that women can take control over their lives: set their own agendas, gain skills (or have their own skills and knowledge recognized), increase self-confidence, solve problems, and develop self-reliance. Its aim is to ensure that women participate fully in economic life across all sectors and throughout all levels of economic activity (UN Women & United Nations Global Compact, 2011).

Both terms have been included in the SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, which is the rationale behind the researcher's decision to use both concepts in tandem throughout the document.

There are a number of policies to help achieve gender equality, but due to size restrictions of this paper we will focus on the following actions: ensuring equal access to men and women to education and training programmes; implementing gender sensitive recruitment of women; and incorporating the gender perspective throughout academic activities. This will be helpful for determining whether or not policies undertaken by WMU have contributed to gender equality and women's empowerment in the maritime transport sector.

## 3 WMU'S POLICIES ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

WMU has developed and implemented its own policies for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment over the years, as has been reported by several authors and reflected in the University Strategic Plans (Roger, 2008; Horck, 2010; Romero & Kitada, 2013). The latest WMU Strategic Plan 2016-2019 anticipates that WMU will take particular account of the relevant goals of the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development, including Goal 5: "Through education, WMU will contribute to the elimination and discrimination against women and further the equality and empowerment of women and ensure their full and effective participation with equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life. A special emphasis will be placed on strategies to attract and retain women seafarers to the maritime industry".

We will look at variations in the number of female graduates and of female faculty, and the introduction of gender perspective in the curriculum, conferences and seminars in order to try and determine if a relationship can be identified between the numeric variations and the introduction of gender policies at WMU. The main research questions are: How has gender parity evolved in the student body and in WMU's faculty? How has the gender perspective in the curriculum, conferences and seminars evolved? And what areas of improvements could be identified?

### 3.1 WMU'S student body composition

Significant progress narrowing the gender gap between men and women in higher education has been reported worldwide in recent decades (Nozaki, Aranha, Dominguez & Nakajima, 2009), which some authors have attributed to legal and policy efforts at international and national level aimed at promoting equality and social justice (Loots & Walker, 2015).

Tansey (2000) affirmed that one of the first steps of the WID programme was the development of an IMO gender-specific fellowship programme focused on disciplines which offered the most immediate and practical interest to women in the maritime field, including maritime law, marine biology, maritime administration and marine sciences at WMU.

According to Roger (2008), the University adopted a proactive role in increasing the number of women in its programmes by funding more fellowships for qualified female students with internally generated University revenues, encouraging donors to allocate funds to support female students, and by encouraging governments and private employers to nominate and support qualified women to pursue studies at WMU.

In order to determine if after the gender gap reduction policies put in place by the University any changes in the student body could be identified, the researcher made use of WMU's registry data on number of graduates by year of graduation, gender and region.

According to those records, there were only 2 females out of 70 total graduates, 2,85% at WMU's

first graduation 1984-85. A significant increase was observed in the late 1990s, when 17 female students graduated out of a class of 89, representing 16.03% of the total. This percentage rose up to 21.15% in 2000. The peak of female graduates at WMU was 67 women representing 31.30% out of 214 total students in 2011. The class of 2016 had a similar number of female graduates, 64 out of a total of 242, representing 26.44%.

Since the University was created until 2016, 4,359 students have graduated; with a female participation of 859 (19.7 %), while the number of males is 3,500 (80.3%).

Table 1. Graduates by Gender and Region (1983-2016)

Regions	Female		Males	
	Total	Total %	Total	Total %
Africa	167	16.8%	825	83.2%
Asia & Pacific	481	22.0%	1,071	78.0%
Europe	103	30.5%	235	69.5%
Latin America & Caribbean	79	18.6%	346	81.4%
Middle East & North Africa	21	5.3%	372	94.7%
North America	8	72.4%	21	72.4%
Total	859	19.7%	3,500	80.3%

According to the IMO's criteria of division by regions of the world followed by WMU's registry, we find that the distribution of that average 19.7 % participation of women in our programmes differs greatly between different regions of the world, as reflected in the table above. The participation of females from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa remains below the 19.7 % media.

### 3.2 WMU's faculty composition

The presence of female students during the early years of operation of the University did not equal that of female professors. While Horck (2010) reported an increase of female teachers employed at MET institutions in European institutions with an average of 17% female presence that year, he noted that during the university's 26 years of existence only one woman had been appointed professor, but she left after two years. He quoted that two women were listed among the academic staff: a US Coast Guard lecturer and one assistant professor from Sweden working in the English Language and Study Skills Programme; and that from "non-structured conversations" with WMU female students on whether they would like to see a WMU female professor, 60 % said no, while 40% said yes.

WMU's Strategic Vision Plans 2010-2015 and 2014-2018 included policies aimed at improving gender balance. A WMU's Recruitment and Appointment Renewal Policy from 2015 stated that "...due regard to equitable and appropriate representation in terms of geography, social systems, education, cultural traditions and gender should be taken into consideration..." while recruiting.

Following these new policies, the University hired a female assistant professor for its Masters and PhD

courses in 2010. A year later came another one. In 2013 the first female assistant professor was promoted to associate professor. In 2015 a female lecturer was promoted to assistant professor and since then, there have not been any additional promotions for female faculty at WMU.

In order to evaluate the composition of WMU's faculty, the researcher made use of hiring statistics provided by Human Resources.

Table 2. WMU's Faculty by Gender (2010-2017)

Faculty Position	Prof.	Assoc.	Assist.	Lecturer	Research Assist.
	f-m	f-m	f-m	f-m	f-m
Year					
2010	0-8	0-1	2-7	0-1	0-0
2011	0-8	0-3	2-4	0-1	2-3
2012	0-7	0-6	2-2	1-0	2-4
2013	0-9	0-7	2-0	2-1	1-1
2014	0-9	1-7	1-1	1-2	3-2
2015	0-11	1-6	2-1	1-2	3-2
2016	0-11	1-7	2-1	3-1	1-2
2017	0-12	2-6	2-1	2-2	3-2

The number of positions has increased from 19 to 32 in the last 7 years (68 %). The number of female faculty has increased from 2 in 2010 to 7 in 2017, representing 10.52% and 21.87% of faculty composition respectively.

### 3.3 Gender perspective in WMU's curriculum

Horck reported that neither was the gender perspective discussion introduced as a common subject for all students at WMU, nor the issue was mentioned in any curriculum in 2010. He also reported that in situations where European MET institutions were proactive introducing cultural awareness education, it might be women faculty who would conduct the courses.

WMU's Strategic Vision Plan 2014-2018 reflects WMU's challenges to expand teaching, research, and the delivery of conferences and seminars in emerging subject areas, citing among the examples corporate social responsibility.

In order to find out if the gender perspective had been included in the curriculum, the researcher had a look at WMU's Academic Handbooks and syllabus of the courses imparted at the Malmö campus from 2010 to 2017.

A new course called Educational Psychology and Sociology was introduced as part of the Maritime Education and Training (MET) Specialization in 2014, where diversity, cultural awareness and gender issues in maritime education are taught. In addition, current policy issues on gender equality was integrated in the course Principles of Maritime Administration and International Institutions run by the Maritime Law & Policy (MLP) Specialization in 2016. Out of a total of 65 master level courses, the above mentioned 2 represent less than 3.07%.

At one point in time all WMU's students were required to write a dissertation as an academic requirement for graduation. This has changed and today it is an optional course called Dissertation

Research. The researcher wanted to find out whether the students have chosen gender perspective as a topic of research in the maritime sector.

However, it is not easy to determine whether or not a dissertation includes gender perspective issues by looking at the index. For that reason we tried to single out, according to the title, those dissertations that clearly focused on that subject.

Out of 504 dissertations written between 1985 and 2016 in the Malmö Campus, only 3 focused on gender perspective issues. They are titled: Women merchant mariners: Empowering West African women (Azirh, 2014); Why not women seafarers?: Towards a developing strategy for the recruitment and retention of women seafarers in cargo ships with particular reference to the Republic of Korea (Jo, 2010); and Women in the maritime industry: A review of female participation and their role in Maritime Education and Training in the 21st century (Aggrey, 2000). A number of 3 represent less than 1 % of all the dissertations written at WMU.

### 3.4 Gender perspective in WMU'S conferences and seminars

In reference to conferences and seminars focusing on the gender perspective, two major conferences of that nature have been held at the university. The first one, the International Conference for Empowering Professional Women in the Maritime World 2008, aimed at providing an insight into the problems and challenges of increasing the effective participation of professional women in the maritime sector. A large number of WMU female graduates attended and took the stand at speakers (Roger, 2008; Horck, 2010). The conference ended adopting a resolution presented to IMO Member States inviting all stakeholders in the maritime sector to actively support and encourage the participation of professional women (IMO, 2008).

The second conference, called Maritime Women: Global Leadership 2014, was a call for strong leadership, to connect several associations of professional women in the maritime transport sector and to promote discussions in education, training and mentoring. A number of key note speakers were women leaders from the global maritime and port sectors, some of which were WMU female graduates. The selection of the rest of the speakers was made based on the 53 abstract submitted from all over the world (Romero & Kitada, 2014).

Quality control of the material was managed by a gender balance scientific committee, the first of its kind at WMU. As a result of the conference, a book of proceedings coordinated by the WMU's female faculty was issued (IMO, 2014b).

As second outcome of this event was the establishment of WMU Women's Association (WMUWA), with the purpose of "connect, educate, and inspire women in the maritime industry and to promote the interest of female maritime professionals." Membership is open to current WMU students (female and male) as well as alumnae. The association counted with a 5 members Secretariat composed of WMUWA members, alumni, influential

female maritime professionals, a female WMU's employee and an IMO representative (IMO, 2014a).

The association has hosted seminars on gender equality and has organized an International Women's Day Workshop every year (IMO, 2016b).

## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Since its early years of operations the University has made a significant contribution to the maritime transport sector, by increasing the number of female graduates from 2.85% to 19.7%, ensuring equal access to men and women to education and training programmes and providing highly qualified maritime education and training to women from all regions of the world to serve in the shipping industry.

Not all regions are equally represented in the number of female graduates from WMU. There are deeper inequalities among the regions, which suggests that perhaps regional strategies could be developed in order to improve the chances of women from low-represented regions having access to higher and professional education.

A significant improvement in the gender balance composition of the faculty has been identified in recent years, by implementing gender sensitive recruitment and retention practices, following the trend previously recognized at MET Institutions around Europe.

Progress has been made towards the introduction of gender perspective in the form of cultural, diversity and gender policy awareness training in the curriculum. However, the number of courses which include it is low. Curiously, as Horck predicted, both courses are led by female faculty. Looking at IMO's purpose behind the development of the GENMET courses, it would make sense to join efforts and develop these training materials together with IMO to be later included as a common subject for all students at WMU, perhaps at the foundational studies level.

The number of dissertations written on gender perspective at WMU is low and it is difficult to assess their impact in the maritime transport sector. However, it is worth mentioning that one of the topics developed (Jo, 2010) served as a background for a Conference in Busan, Korea, where IMO's Member States recognized that a strategy was needed in order to integrate women seafarers into the maritime sector. That strategy is being currently developed by WMU's faculty in cooperation with IMO (IMO, 2014a).

A milestone for the University has been the development of the two women conferences, which were an opportunity for current students and faculty to get in contact with former students who are now holding leadership positions in the sector, showing the added valued that the education received at WMU brought to their careers. WMUWA on the other hand, could be seen as a bridge by current students, graduates and leaders for remaining in contact with each other for mentoring other women in their countries.

WMU Women's Association has received strong support from IMO's gender programme. As an

example, one IMO-fellowship per year is specifically designated for an appropriately-qualified female candidate, who is tasked with the responsibility of actively support the Association during the period of her studies. Two candidates have taken advantage of this programme, one from Vietnam in 2015 and the next from Honduras in 2016 (IMO, 2016a).

There are no current statistics available that indicate the number WMU's female graduates who have reached managerial and decision-making positions in the maritime transport sector, which could be the subject of future research.

Finally, the role played by WMU's female faculty should not be underestimated, as they have become role models not only for students but for other women in the sector. They have proactively led initiatives in teaching, research and outreach activities through the organization and delivery of conferences and seminars on gender equality and through the involvement in consultancies and in peer-reviewed publications on the topic.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

From the above discussed findings, the following conclusions could be drawn:

Policies adopted for increasing the number of female graduates have been relatively successful, and an augmented presence in the student body has been recorded, which has benefited the maritime community by providing female leaders globally.

Policies adopted for reaching gender parity within the faculty have opened the doors for female academics to join the University, which in turn benefits the maritime sector by incorporating the female perspective in education.

The gender perspective has been integrated in sections of the curriculum, conferences and seminars, and efforts in this direction must be continued and improved.

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