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Water Sanitation Hygiene

Global WASH Cluster Operational Research

The role of Women and Women-led/Women-rights organizations in the Humanitarian WASH Sector and Coordination

Sarah Pillone and Daniele Lantagne, Tufts University

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1 Introduction

According to the World Economic Forum's 2023 Global Gender Gap report[1], women comprise only 29.2% of the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) workforce, compared to nearly 50% of non-STEM occupations, in 146 nations evaluated. Additionally, women are more likely to be in the 'softer' side of STEM roles, such as 'people and culture' at 61%, compared to 'engineering' (20%) and 'cloud computing' (14%) (Figure 1).

Women also face challenges when pursuing STEM leadership roles, for example, women represent 29.9% of senior workers, but only 12.4% in corporate suite roles (Figure 1). Overall, organizations, governments, educational institutions, and the larger scientific and technological community need to work together to remove barriers for women in advancing in STEM careers.

These inequalities are also represented in the United Nations system as a whole, the humanitarian response sector in general, and specifically in the humanitarian Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) sector, including the Global WASH Cluster (GWC), inclusive of the WASH National Coordination Platforms (NCPs).

Within the UN system as a whole, the representation of women in the professional and higher categories (P-1 to D-2) was 66% at P-1 and 37% at D-2 (Figure 2), and increased overall from 45.3% to 47% from 2019–2021. UNICEF, specifically, had 50.8% of women in professional and higher categories at the end of 2021.

Figure 1
Participation of Women in STEM, by job type and level
(from https://swe.org/research/2023/global-stem-workforce/)
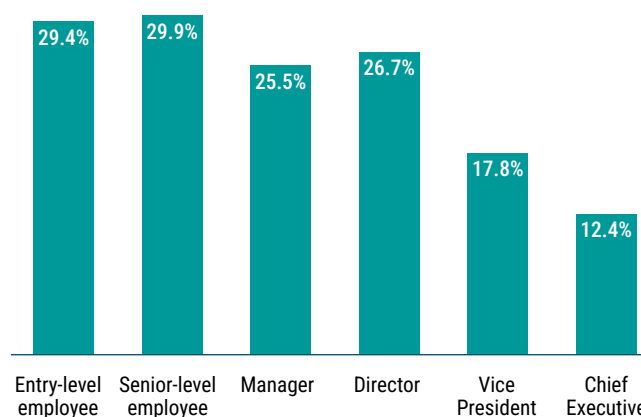
Percentage of Women Workers by professional Cluster 2021
Source: World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2021
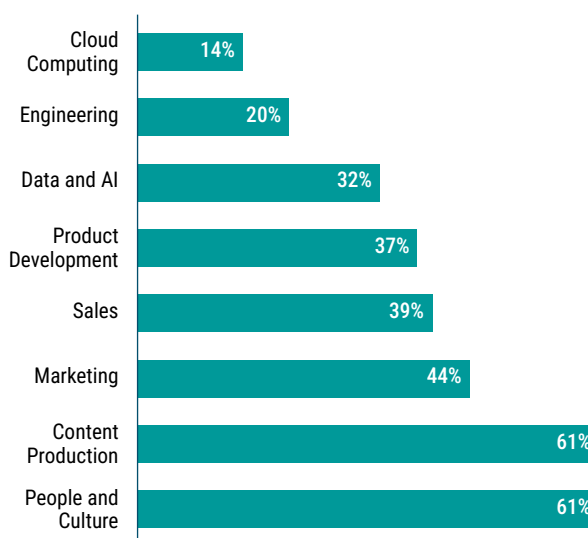
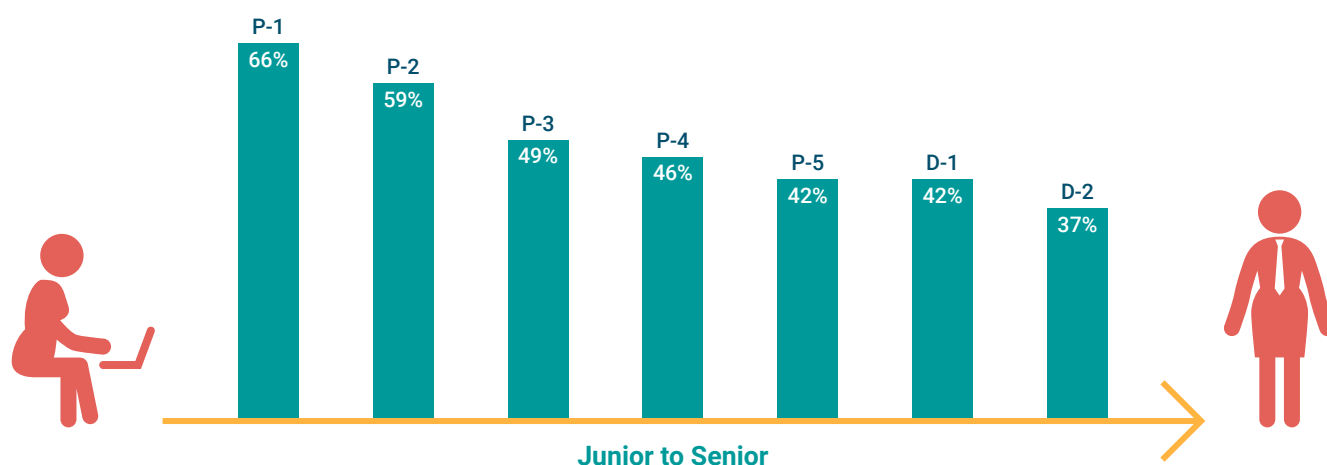**Percentage of Women in STEM Occupations by Seniority Level, 2023**
Source: World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2023

1 https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/

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Figure 2
Representation of Women in the UN System, P-1 to D-2, 2021
(from https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/
status-of-women-in-the-un-system-2023-infographic-en.pdf)

P-1 66%
P-2 59%
P-3 49%
P-4 46%
P-5 42%
D-1 42%
D-2 37%

Junior to Senior

For the humanitarian response system as a sector, an academic manuscript published in 2020 found that approximately 40% of humanitarian responders are women. The authors conducted a non-systematic literature review and summarized their research with the six "key messages" included in Figure 3 to the right of this text.

In humanitarian WASH specifically, discussions on gender and WASH focus on two components: women as primary users of WASH services, and women as leaders in the WASH sector. While there are many policy documents on women as users of WASH services, we focus herein on women as leaders in humanitarian WASH. In 2020, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) published a report on women's participation in the humanitarian WASH sector in South Sudan. The report found that there is a gender gap in technical and leadership abilities, with women's labor more likely to be volunteer and unpaid, and men's labor more likely to be paid. Additionally, the most frequent barriers to women working in humanitarian WASH in a survey were: community attitudes, family pressure to stay home, and caring responsibilities and household chores. However, in discussion groups, additional barriers of violence against women, lack of access to education, and pregnancy and maternity leave system were identified.

Figure 3
Key messages from peer-reviewed research on Women in Humanitarian Sector
(from https://conflictandhealth.biomedcentral.com/
counter/pdf/10.1186/s13031-020-00330-9.pdf)

Key messages

- More women leaders can transform the humanitarian system to better meet the health needs of those affected by conflict and humanitarian emergencies.

- Women are significantly under-represented in the most senior humanitarian leadership roles.

- Patriarchal attitudes restrict women's aspiration to becoming leaders in several conflict-affected societies.

- Humanitarian leadership teams that are more diverse and inclusive.

- Organisational culture across the conflict and humanitarian health domain significantly hinders women pursuing leadership roles.

- Inclusive environments to enable women to become leaders creates broader understanding of the global health system

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Figure 4
**Gender breakdown of work, and barriers
to women in the WASH Sector, South Sudan**
(from https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/
abridged-research-closing-gender.pdf)

**Gender breakdown of WASH teams
across 3 humanitarian organizations**

- Male
- Female

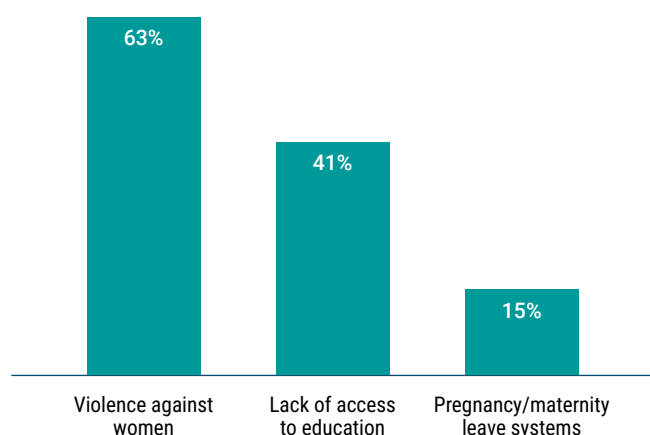|	Managerial staff	Programme health	Programme engineering	Volunteers
Male	20	20	31	192
Female	6	10	0	257
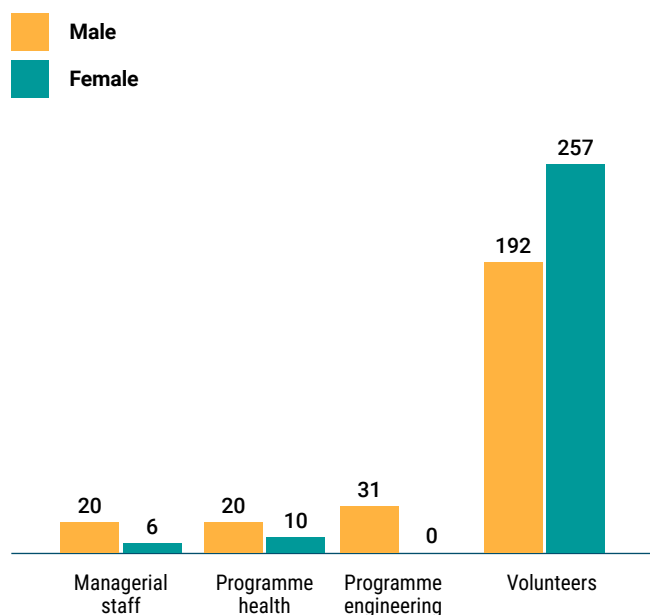
**Most frequently identified 'Top 3' barriers to
women working in WASH in Online Staff Survey**

- Male
- Female

n = 84 persons
29 female / 55 male

	Community Attitudes	Family pressure to stay home	Caring reposnsibilities and household chores
Male	69%	55%	59%
Female	69%	55%	44%
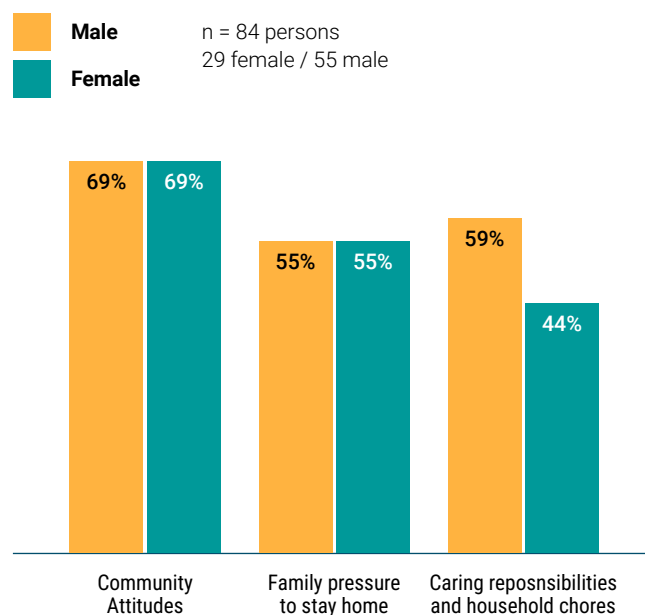
**Barriers to women working in WASH frequently cited
by community and site-level discussion groups**

n = 68 persons
40 female / 28 male

Violence against women	Lack of access to education	Pregnancy/maternity leave systems
63%	41%	15%

As can be seen above, there exist:

1 summaries of information and research in women in leadership in the UN system and humanitarian response generally; and,

2 there are specific summaries of women in humanitarian WASH leadership at the country level in South Sudan.

These identify specific numbers and barriers at the global and national level to women's participate in leadership in the humanitarian WASH sector. However, there is currently no identified general information on the experience of Women in the humanitarian WASH sector globally. The work described in this report is intended to begin to address this gap.

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2 Methods

Data were collected through four activities:

1 *a literature review* of information related to Women involved in the humanitarian WASH sector;

2 *interviews with Coordination staff* in WASH National Coordination Platforms;

3 *interviews with Women's Rights / Women-Led Organizations (WROs/WLOs)* involved in WASH National Coordination Platforms ; and,

4 *online surveys* of WASH Coordination staff.

Data were collected by UNICEF staff and a consultant, and each of these activities are briefly described below. Data collection occurred during 2022 and 2023. Data were provided in de-identified format to Tufts University. The Tufts University Institutional Review Board approved this project as secondary analysis of de-identified data.

Literature review

The UNICEF consultant conducted a web-based literature review and identified 74 documents for inclusion in an Excel spreadsheet, with 24 deemed as high-relevance. Information and quotes were extracted from the data by the Consultant. During writing, an additional web search was conducted by the authors at Tufts University to identify updated documents. Overall, information from relevant literature was included in the introduction and discussion of this report.

Interviews with WASH Coordination Staff and WROs/WLOs partners

Key informant interviews were conducted with both Coordination staff and WROs/WLOs who were identified (with some participating in) WASH NCPs. These data collection methods were used to understand respondents' views of the experiences, barriers, and facilitators of women throughout their pursuit of careers in WASH.

For Coordination staff, the questions asked covered demographics (gender, organization, experience, role, country), current work as a Coordination staff (motivations for working, plans for the future, positive and negative aspects of jobs, challenges to staying in coordination and how organizations could overcome those challenges), general perceptions (why women don't work in WASH, if the respondents feels there is gender discrimination in WASH, recommendations for how to attract women to WASH positions), and how the NCPs work with WROs/WLOs.

Overall, 17 interviews with Coordinators and Information Management Staff were conducted, including 12 women and five men. Notes from 16 of these interviews were typed for 16 interviews, and an automated Zoom transcript was provided for the remaining interview.

For WROs/WLOs, the questions asked were demographics (as above), work the organization completes in WASH, and participation in NCPs and coordination (including reasons joined, barriers and enablers to participation). Overall, 16 WROs/WLOs were interviewed, with some having full transcripts and some typed notes.

Online Survey

The online survey was intended for people who had worked, or were currently working, as Coordination staff. Questions were on the process and experience of recruitment, career plans, perception of women and men as Coordinator staff, and working with WROs/WLOs. The online survey was completed by 11 people, including 10 women.

Data Analysis

All data were provided to Tufts University in de-identified format. All data were imported in NVivo and coded into emergent themes. Results are presented by theme and sub-themes, with quotations for elucidation of key points. Please note that – as the data were a mix of notes and transcriptions – numerical analysis was not performed, and quotes extracted as a mixture of direct quotes and interviewer notes.

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3 Results

The analysis of surveys and interviews with WASH coordination staff and WROs/WLOs resulted in four overarching theme categories:

1   women are not given a place in the humanitarian WASH sector;

2   the importance of women contributions in humanitarian WASH coordination;

3   motivations for women to get involved in humanitarian WASH coordination; and,

4   recommendations for improvement for women's participation in humanitarian WASH coordination.
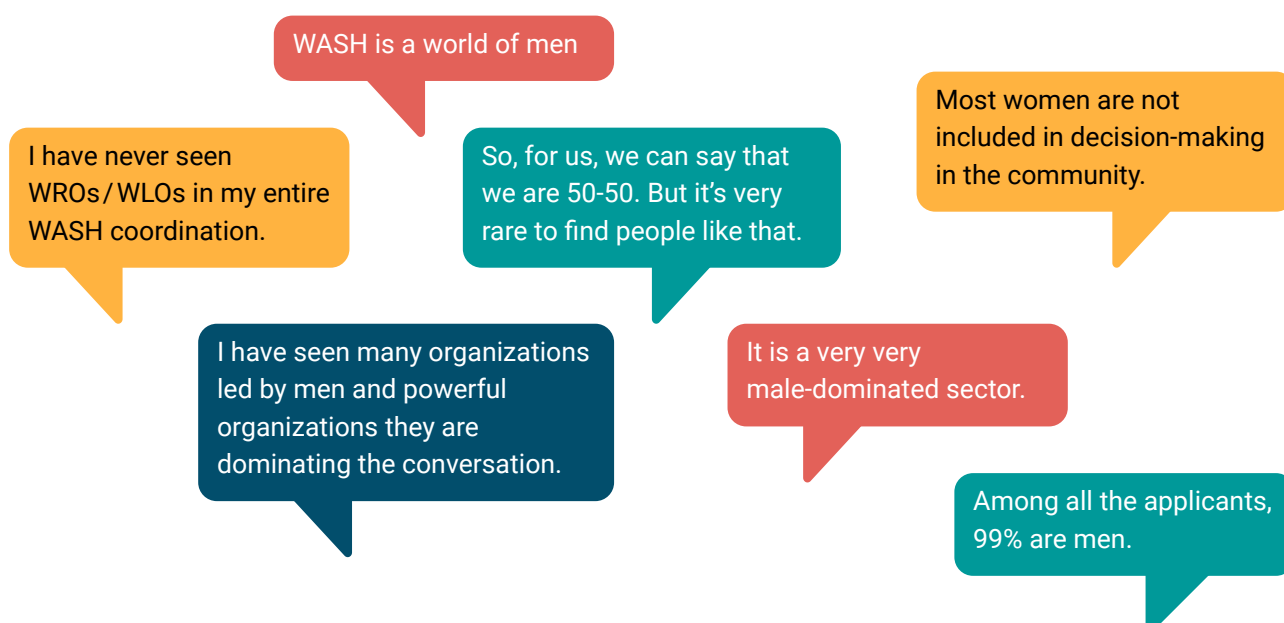
Each of these themes, and their associated sub-themes, are described in detail below, with key quotes extracted for elucidation. Please note that, where differences between Coordination staff and WROs/WLOs were seen in analysis, those were called out specifically in the text.

Theme 1
Women are not given a place in humanitarian WASH

Respondents reported, in general, that there are few women working in WASH NCPs, especially in Coordination and WROs/WLOs roles. Respondents expressed that women are often disadvantaged in WASH careers due to cultural biases, creating barriers to entering and working in the WASH sector, and structural barriers. Each sub-theme is described below.

Low Prevalence of Women in the Humanitarian WASH sector

Globally, respondents reported a clear lack of women's representation in the WASH sector generally, with respondents considering WASH a "male-dominated environment." This depiction of WASH as male-dominated was consistent across respondents and types of work. Notably, respondents described remarkably low rates of female applicants to WASH coordination positions as compared male applicants. However, some respondents described successes in the representation of women in humanitarian WASH leadership, while still noting that this is rare.

WASH is a world of men

I have never seen WROs/WLOs in my entire WASH coordination.

So, for us, we can say that we are 50-50. But it's very rare to find people like that.

Most women are not included in decision-making in the community.

I have seen many organizations led by men and powerful organizations they are dominating the conversation.

It is a very very male-dominated sector.

Among all the applicants, 99% are men.

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Para cada infancia,
agua segura

Barriers to women entering the humanitarian WASH Sector and WASH Coordination

Respondents reported that women feel at a disadvantage to entering humanitarian WASH careers in the first place, often due their lack of formal education and opportunity in technical fields, such as science and engineering, as compared to men. The gender imbalance causes women to lack confidence in their skills, reporting women need to be much better than men need to be, to have influence in the WASH sector overall. Further, respondents reported that women sometimes are simply not aware of the existence of the WASH sector and opportunities for careers in the WASH sector. Coordination staff respondents commonly described a general lack of awareness of WASH activities among women and WROs. WROs/WLO respondents commented on the lack of awareness of the WASH Coordination Platforms, mentioning how other organizations were unaware of the NCP, its benefits, and how it functions, which prevents them from engaging in coordination.

We also question ourselves if we can do the work. We need to [be] 300% before we start.

But when they see men, men, men, they will feel like we cannot do it…

Women do not know available opportunities win WASH.

They don't have the capacity or education to work in the WASH sector.

WROs/WLOs do not know WASH could be a thing.

I think I have less opportunity than men.

We can do better than men, but we are still unaware of it.

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Barriers to women working in the humanitarian WASH Sector and WASH Coordination

Respondents described how women who do have careers in humanitarian WASH face discrimination and unequal treatment. Many of these stems from self-described "challenging power dynamics with men." Despite having equal qualifications and positions as men, they report that they are not respected by men, or by leaders and authority figures in the communities in which they work. Women in humanitarian WASH positions shared instances of verbal harassment targeted at their gender. They also shared instances of discrimination in the recruitment phase, where they were not invited to participate in processes of WASH hiring in equal ways to men.

In Coordination, several women referenced exclusive "WASH Mafia", or network of men, that prevents women from having power and footing in WASH groups both at the recruitment stage and once working in the sector.

People were teasing me with my accent, and the coordinator had an accent, but nobody was teasing him.

I was fighting men to build a toilet dedicated for girls of reproductive age in schools.

My male supervisor discouraged me from joining the initiative.

No-one asks men to share their academic background before men speak or contribute to anything.

We don't even get opportunities to apply.

Sometimes the head of the community is not accepting to talk to women like us.

The men's network is too strong in WASH.

If women are vocal, people think you are hysterical, and we are expected to behave in certain ways.

You have to backchannel to be heard, especially as an expert in this topic.

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This discrimination is perpetuated by a gender bias against women that they are not "technical" enough to contribute to humanitarian WASH Coordination or as WROs/WLOs. Both Coordination staff and WRO/WLO respondents described a pervasive belief that WASH positions are only a job for men, stating that WASH actors often fail to recognize not only women's technical competencies, but also the added value of women as primary users of WASH services. Coordination staff specifically mentioned the bias that women (and not men) are responsible for caring for their children, which negatively impacts their odds of recruitment for coordination position. WRO/WLO respondents noted that women are viewed as "users" in WASH services, rather than "experts", creating the idea that their responsibility in performing WASH-related chores is separate from their expertise and ability to influence the WASH sector priorities.

> I think that WASH Sector is very focused on technical aspects, so the "problems" are approached from technical point of view only… it's not a secret that women, due to gender stereotypes, are not considered as "experts" in these areas.

> Women are not considered as strong enough to be coordinators.

> We do not want to recruit women because she gets pregnant and stop working.

> … it is considered not appropriate for women to leave their children at home while it is accepted for men.

> …women are not considered as "experts" but as "users"

> WASH is seen as a men's thing.

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Structural Barriers

Respondents described that women in humanitarian WASH careers face other tangible challenges to success, related to, and perpetuated by, gender biases and societal structures.

First, as many women spend more time taking care of children, respondents, especially those in Coordination, stated that this precludes women having the time, flexibility, and development necessary for their career in WASH. Additionally, respondents in Coordination mentioned that the lack of investment in training women, and the burden of caring for family together pose barriers to pursuing education that assists in advancing their WASH careers.

Additionally, respondents in Coordination mentioned that the nature of cluster coordination in crisis settings heightens the barriers for women with families. Coordination respondents communicated they felt distress when working in non-family duty stations that separated them from their families. Some women described avoiding work in emergency situations to protect their safety so they can take care of their families.

Lastly, WRO/WLO respondents described struggling to access funding for their programs. Particularly, some WROs/WLOs are "excluded" from sources of funds as they are not technically focused organizations, making them ineligible for many centralized funding opportunities.

Please note that many of these structural barriers noted by respondents are not only relevant to humanitarian WASH, but to the larger sector of humanitarian work. The balance of work and family is a struggle across all work sectors, non-family duty stations are common in humanitarian response, and there is a broader issue among local and national actors that prevents them from receiving start-up grants that can kickstart their initiatives needed to establish themselves as WROs/WLOs.

> No funding is invested to train women to become more "acquainted" on the technicalities of water supply.

> When there is money, women are excluded.

> If you have a baby, you are not feeling good to go. You don't feel good to leave babies.

> There is no enabling environment for women to network and receive money.

> [You] do not want to take the risks anymore when you have families.

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Theme 2
Importance of Women in the Humanitarian WASH Sector

Despite the barriers that women face in working in the humanitarian WASH sectors, respondents reported that women have a tremendous stake and influence in WASH programming, and that women are essential to designing WASH interventions. This is because women understand WASH needs, and women have the ability to represent other women in WASH decision-making. Both of these sub-themes are described below.

Women know humanitarian WASH programming

Respondents stated that WASH services are women's work. This sub-theme arose frequently from both Coordination and WRO/WLO respondents. Respondents reported that, as women are the primary beneficiaries of WASH improvement initiatives, women can inform such initiatives through a first-hand perspective. Additionally, respondents reported women understand WASH needs, as they are the ones that perform water-related tasks such as water-fetching and require improved WASH access in their daily lives during menstrual hygiene management (MHM).

Respondents stated that women know the needs of WASH infrastructure as they are its main users, and therefore women are most knowledgeable of what needs to be done in WASH programming.

Coordination staff and WRO/WLO respondents also discussed having the ability to contribute to perspectives related to gender-based violence (GBV), as they are the ones who experience this violence. One WRO/WLO respondent shared the example of informing where to build a toilet facility to increase safety, and prevent the rape of women.

When water is lacking, it has negative impact on women. Women have to spend more time to find water. Lack of adequate WASH facilities hinder women's livelihoods.

WASH is women.

I will know the challenges that women and young girls are passing through.

Women, at the same time, are the main users of those water systems, and should be considered and included.

It is women who carry water to home and that is women who experience violence.

We are the biggest consumer of water. Women are at the center of water.

WASH is women's issues. They are at the core of the work. WASH is actually women's work and about what people want and women want.

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Women can Represent other Women in the Humanitarian WASH Sector

Both coordination staff and WROs/WLOs stated that women, as compared to men, are connected to communities and well-trusted by other women. One WRO/WLO respondent shared:

Most of these communities, they don't really like men entering their houses or seeing them interacting with their girls. They sometimes they seem to be suspecting other things else, so when they see female, they feel free. They allow female to enter their houses and allow female to have a conversation with the other females.

Respondents described the social skills ("soft skills") of women that enhance the above quote, stating that women can: hear the concerns and needs of women in their communities, serve as liaisons between women in communities and WASH decisions, and advocate for women's voices. Both coordination staff and WRO/WLO respondents shared examples of successes of women, including themselves, influencing decisions in the WASH sector.

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They know how to talk to women and how to ask questions in local languages.

I can use my soft skills – network and leaderaship.

WROs/WLOs can help WASH actors to reach those women and girls.

They forgot that we have adolescent girls with MHH needs. They sometimes forgot about persons with disabilities. If women coordinate WASH cluster, she will think about these aspects.

They feel free to discuss with females like them, rather than sharing things with men.

There are conversations that require women perspective to be factored in the decisions and women leader are an entry point for make this happen.

We are always in the field. We can reach out to all women's networks. We can reach out to more.

I can help setting up WASH standards which are gender responsive.

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Theme 3
Motivations for Women in Humanitarian WASH Sector and Coordination

Respondents reported that women pursue coordination and leadership jobs in the WASH Sector for both professional and career development reasons, as well as personal passion for the work and its impact. These are described below.

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Professional Motivators

Respondents who are Coordination staff view the job as an opportunity to diversify their experience through working with a wider network of partners and donors. They also sought out the coordination role to learn valuable skills such as management, leadership, and partnerships that they can use for professional development. These respondents also shared that they value the autonomy and flexibility of the coordination role that allows them to work on new WASH initiatives and set their own agenda.

> I like the freedom in my work.

> I wanted to push to do something different from what I used to do. I wanted to work in a bigger arena.

Personal Motivators

Coordination staff respondents described their love for their careers in WASH and coordination for multiple reasons, including a general interest in working in WASH, as well as work on inter-sectoral issues, with stakeholders, doing advocacy, helping accountability, and working on strategic and technical aspects. Both Coordination staff and WRO/WLO respondents were motivated by the opportunity to empower other women and girls, and by their ability to influence decision-making and have impact in humanitarian action of the WASH sector.

> I stayed in WASH because I love my job and WASH.

> I want to enhance advocacy role.

> This motivates us to be part of the WASH, to support the young girls an also support the community.

> I am impacting my country.

> I am so passionate in implementing WASH standards.

> I want to empower other women.

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Theme 4
Recommendations to Overcome Barriers

As described in the previous sections, respondents reported that women face many barriers throughout the timeline of a career in the humanitarian WASH sector, from lack of educational opportunities, to lack of information and recruitment for positions, to lack of financial support, lack of training opportunities, and relatively higher childcare responsibilities during their career. Respondents shared recommendations for making the WASH sector more accessible and favorable to women along the full continuum of the career path. Below are six sections with barriers, and the recommendations that respondents had to overcover them. Please note we are recording what respondents stated, and that some recommendations made by respondents may not be either feasible, or within scope, for the GWC to address. In the discussion section, we summarize barriers that are feasible/within scope for the GWC to address compared to barriers that are outside GWC scope.

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Barrier 1

Lack of awareness of, and recruitment for jobs in humanitarian WASH.

Recommendation 1
Deepen the applicant pool with intentional recruitment efforts

Respondents recommended making specific and intentional efforts to recruit women to enter the humanitarian WASH workforce. Respondents asked that the GWC and WASH NCPs proactively reach out and recruit women. Respondents recommended reaching out directly to women, especially those with WASH and coordination skills, and also host career workshops to attract women. This would have the effect of showing available opportunities to women, then they may be encouraged to apply to positions they are otherwise unaware of, or feel underqualified to apply for. Please note that, although respondents asked for this, the GWC and WASH NCPs are not authorized to complete recruitment, and other less direct support activities might need to be completed, such as involving the GWC and SAG members in the recruitment of new CC/IMOs at the country level and having a more gender-balanced Field Support Team.

> Only thing the woman needed was opportunity.

> Send job opening bilaterally to women who have talents.

> Being more proactive and headhunt talented women.

> We have to publicize WASH opportunities among women's networks.

> If they want to have women, they need to encourage. If women have good background, encourage them to participate.

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<div style="background-color:#F5A623;">

Barrier 2

</div>

<div style="background-color:#0E4E6E;">

**Women are disincentivized from applying
due to high qualifications listed.**

</div>

Recommendation 2
Write job descriptions that encourage women to apply

Respondents reported that women are disincentivized from applying when they see the number of qualifications needed. They instead assume the WASH position will go to man and do not attempt to apply. One participant described:

> *There's the aspect of the shames, the typical woman thinks OK there's a job. Can I apply? She looks, she thinks, no I'm going to face the men so how can I really? And so, it's the problem, how can I try to redirect, how can I try to overcome this aspect? From that, the woman finds herself marginalized, she withdraws, instead of trying her luck, and withdraws even though it could be offered to a woman. It's an aspect of a courage. We end up with less female applications.*

Multiple respondents recommended that job descriptions should be written so they encourage, rather than disincentivize, women to apply. By writing more inclusive job descriptions that list both the technical and social/soft skills, women – who have the technical skills necessary to apply – may be motivated to apply more to male-dominant roles. Applicants also suggested writing women are 'favored' in recruitment, although this may not be appropriate, depending on hiring agency policies. This is further discussed below.

> Put a package of sensitization to the women to say that the women, take the courage to apply on the positions

> If they have female applicants with minimum qualification, give her opportunities to take part of interviews instead of not shortlisting them because of qualification.

> In the recruitment we can say that women are favored.

> WASH is beyond engineers. At recruitment level, it should be clear.

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Barrier 3

Women who do apply have lower rates of being hired than men.

Recommendation 3
Increase acceptance of women into WASH humanitarian positions

Respondents reported that women who apply to humanitarian WASH positions in coordination may experience lower rates of job acquisition due to lacking engineering skills (given that women are 29.2% of the STEM workforce) when compared to male applicants. There were conflicting views among respondents regarding the selection process of women applicants to WASH positions. One participant recommends "positive discrimination", or recruiting women based on their gender rather than skills to promote gender equity. Other respondents recommended giving priority to the woman applicant over the man if they have equal qualifications and experience.

Some men and women coordination staff argued against the "positive discrimination" approach, questioning why it is beneficial to hire women when they have fewer professional and technical qualifications.

> Sometimes we find a woman. She does not meet the criteria. But we will take her since it is a woman.

> With the equal competency between men and women, then hire women.

> I do positive discrimination when you recruit. I shouldn't have to deliberately recruit women in the team, but I do that because I believe in gender-balanced.

> [Need] more balanced organizations rather than women's organizations.

> Why would you promote a woman just because of women in WASH network?

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Barrier 4

Gender roles and biases result in jobs being unfavorable.

Recommendation 4
Improve conditions for women to access WASH Coordination positions

Respondents reported that there are barriers to women to access WASH coordination positions, as gender roles and biases result in the role being unfavorable to them. First, respondents reported that women in coordination struggle to take care of their families while stationed at non-family duty stations, and women in WROs/WLOs state they receive minimal payment and funding for their work. The role of women to care for their families also limits their abilities to pursue education and qualifications and therefore recruitment for higher-paying jobs, thus creating a gap between women and men in their level of experience, which dictates pay scales in the overall UN system.

Respondents recommended that, once women enter WASH coordination or leadership, there should be more support in place to allow them to stay. Respondents from WROs/WLOs included funding for initiatives, travel, and childcare to meetings in this recommendation. Two women coordination staff also suggested payment reform to compensate for out of work hours to help increase gender parity, although note that in the UN system salaries are based on qualifications and years of experience and work performed, which is a system-wide gender parity issue at UNICEF.

Many women coordination staff respondents also desired the addition of more family duty stations, and prioritization of women to work in them, thus reducing the burden of having to care for a family outside of their work. Please note that despite respondents' wishes, the addition of family duty stations is not a feasible solution, as coordination staff are often appointed to work in emergency and crisis settings.

> I would like to be based in a family duty station.

Lastly, a few coordination staff suggested that the working conditions be made safer for women and there was an improved "enabling environment", although details of such ideas were not provided.

> More support for travel.

> We need someone to give us that first push, then we will continue by ourselves.

> Set rules for "out of working hours" availability that are generally a base for gender discrimination.

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Barrier 5

Women struggle to access educational and training opportunities.

Recommendation 5
Improve access to educational and training opportunities for women

Respondents reported that women working in the WASH sector do not access equal education and skill-building opportunities as men, placing them at a disadvantage for the technical side of WASH interventions. They also face disrespect and discrimination from their male counterparts and authorities due to the assumption that they lack technical skills.

Both WRO/WLO and Coordination staff respondents, but especially Coordination staff, discussed the need for training and capacity building for women entering the humanitarian WASH sector, and encouragement for women to attend them. Respondents recommended that these trainings include both training modules and orientations for individual Coordination staff, as well as training for WROs/WLOs on hard skills such as fixing water pumps. Please note respondents did not mention retraining men.

Respondents reported that capacity strengthening would instill confidence in coordination staff and WROs/WLOs to lead WASH initiatives in their communities.

Coordination staff responders expressed that a crucial element of capacity strengthening is mentorship and coaching. Through mentorship, women can gain skills, but also learn about updates and careers in WASH Coordination and the sector overall. Thus, supervision allows a flow of information from experienced women to women first entering the WASH sector, and even can start as early as the recruitment process. This is further discussed below.

Women need more support – mentoring and coaching to assure them that they are good.

If I have a mentor in the system and the mentor can help the recruitment process.

Peer support from experienced coordinators to less experience women coordinators.

Let the young one enrich the capacity, the person will leap.

Encourage women to go to training and improve their expertise.

We do a capacity building and now the donors have to trust them and give them money directly.

Invest in education and capacity building.

UNICEF provided training for partners about the system, and it is needed for us so that WLOs can be competitive in WASH.

Training is motivating.

… build the capacity of a females to also participate to so that they can be able to handle the hard component of the WASH too.

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Barrier 6

Women lack connections to foster career development and social support.

Recommendation 6
Create a network of women for collaboration and support

Along with the vertical mentorship opportunities described above, respondents also stressed the importance of creating a horizontal network of women for collaboration and support. These can include spaces, forums, coffee chats, and exchanges that offer opportunities for women to discuss WASH related challenges, their work and experiences, and the barriers they face as women. They can both offer support to each other and as mentioned above, share knowledge and connections that enhances their recruitment potential.

Respondents advocated for connecting and creating technical groups of WROs, arguing that these partnerships could produce strategies and sustain the power of women in the WASH sector. One Coordination staff stated that they are already developing an "MHM technical group" in their country. They also stated that WROs/WLOs should be included in the WASH Cluster and SAG meetings. Several respondents described already having the ability to locate and connect WROs together.

WRO/WLO respondents especially advocated for strengthened partnerships with other organizations and WASH groups to increase the awareness and credibility of their impact. They stated that this would also promote the work of women in humanitarian WASH to inspire women in their communities.

Respondents also explained how the sector can use partnerships to reach local actors encourage localization, such as through encouraging a "local level surge team." This improvement is not specific to the role of women in the WASH sector but aligns with the recommendation from respondents to expand network and community connections. This idea was consistent among coordination staff and WROs/WLOs. Please note this recommendation includes WASH, but also could be broader than WASH.

> Strengthening of collaboration and participation and really give opportunities to local organizations.

> Local actors should be empowered to take leading role in this sector.

> We want to have more local partners to take over responsibilities to coordinate.

> More we support each other, the stronger our voices are heard at the higher level.

> We have a link to other sectors and developing a joint strategy.

> We can reach out to all women's networks. We can reach out to more. The impact will be more.

> Overcoming this challenge is achieved by women associating.

> There should be a moment only for women.

> We can create a strong and negotiable power within WASH sector by creating the network. We need to speak with community more openly rather than speaking in a meeting room or corridor.

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Barrier 7

Lack of metrics/standards to guide efforts to increase women in WASH.

Recommendation 7
Streamline metrics/standards to guide efforts to increase the representation of women in WASH Coordination and in the sector overall

WASH Coordination staff responders felt the WASH sector must unite and determine how to increase women's representation for effective change. Coordination staff supported creating toolkits to inform coordination (which are being developed), determining key global indicators and targets to monitor the participation of women in the WASH sector and coordination platforms, and delivering guidelines and roadmaps to assist WROs/WLOs to join the WASH NCPs. Please note that roadmaps and guidelines have been produced by IASC and others on these topics, but such initiatives may not be known to respondents (as discussed in the next section).

Several Coordination staff respondents also suggested the writing of concrete deliverables, such as a "chapter on women in WASH strategy." Please note respondents did not have a place they thought would be best for this.

Lastly, respondents noted the need to educate men and the GWC on the value of the leadership and participation of women in the humanitarian WASH sector, using women's voices. Other recommendations by respondents included learning strategies from the private sector and incorporating talent management in UNICEF. Please note that these recommendations stretch beyond the scope of the GWC into UNICEF recruitment practices.

Document what is already happening.

Make it a national agenda.

We need to have a singular approach in the sector. We should have a global agreement on how to tackle this challenge.

Men coordinators, with few exceptions, do not think about it so a guideline would be helpful.

Working with WROs should be in the guidelines. It should be the entry point. They should be embedded in SAG.

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4 Discussion and Recommendations

The work presented herein aimed to understand the experiences of women in humanitarian WASH coordination and leadership. Overall, 17 Coordination staff and 16 WROs/WLOs were interviewed, and 11 Coordination staff also completed an online survey. All data were uploaded to the software package NVivo and analyzed via coding into emergent themes and sub-themes. We identified four overarching themes: women are not given a place in the WASH sector, the importance of having women represented in WASH Coordination and within the sector, motivations for women to apply to WASH positions, and recommendations to overcome barriers. These themes reveal the underlying existence of societal and cultural biases that fuel gender discrimination in the WASH sector workforce throughout the journey of a woman's career, the desire of women to learn and perform a career in the WASH sector, and the need for systems and policies to enable women to successfully work in WASH coordination and leadership.

Our results on the societal and gender biases that fuel gender discrimination in the workplace are similar to, and reflect, those of other key reports on the role of women in historically male-dominated STEM fields. In a 2010 American Association of University Women (AAUW) report, researchers found women and girls do not perceive themselves as having the same technical competencies as men, diminishing their confidence in entering the fields, and so do not enter STEM profession[2]. Further, they described feeling a lack of respect in a male-dominated field and sensing an exclusive attitude held by men in engineering. In a key thesis on stemming the flow of women away from engineering, researchers summarized the reasons women never entered, left, and remain in engineering (as presented in Figure 5).

Figure 5
Reasons women enter, leave, and stay in STEM[3]

Key findings
Some women left the field, some never entered and many are currently engineers.

Those who left:

- Nearly half said they left because of working conditions, too much travel, lack of advancement or low salary.
- One-in-three women left because they did not like the workplace climate, their boss or the culture.
- One-in-four left to spend time with family.
- Those who left were not different from current engineers in their interests, confidence in their abilities, or the positive outcomes they expected from performing engineering related tasks.

Those who didn't enter engineering after graduation:

- A third said it was because of their perceptions of engineering as being inflexible or the engineering workplace culture as being non-supportive of women.
- Thirty percent said they did not pursue engineering after graduationbecause they were no longer interested in engineering or were interested in another field.
- Many said they are using the knowledge and skills gained in their education in a number of other fields.

Work decisions of women currently working in Engineering:

- Women's decisions to stay in engineering are best predicted by a combination of psychological factors and factors related to the organizational climate.
- Women's decisions to stay in engineering can be influenced by key supportive people in the organization, such as supervisors and co-workers. Current women engineers who worked in companies that valued and recognized their contributions and invested substantially in their training and professional development, expressed greatest levels of satisfaction with their jobs and careers.
- Women engineers who were treated in a condescending, patronizing manner, and were belittled and undermined by their supervisors and co-workers were most likely to want to leave their organizations.
- Women who considered leaving their companies were also very likely to consider leaving the field of engineering altogether.

2   https://www.aauw.org/app/uploads/2020/03/why-so-few-research.pdf
3   https://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/NSF_Stemming%20the%20Tide%20Why%20Women%20Leave%20Engineering.pdf

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Lastly, the experience of having a community of women colleagues, mentors, and role models is a key reason women join STEM fields: "For many women, this common background is a transforming experience that supports their career choice in science, mathematics, and technology. This transforming experience is composed of personal contact with a role model and often an intimate involvement with the process that serves as an invitation into the world of scientific inquiry."[4] As can be seen, the overarching themes identified in this qualitative research on women in humanitarian WASH coordination are similar to, and reflect, the literature on why and how women stay, or do not stay, in technical fields.

Despite the barriers respondents reported, women respondents continuously expressed the desire and readiness to pursue humanitarian WASH careers and to improve their ability to do so. Respondents expressed that they have the agency and desire to participate in training to increase their technical skills, to use their soft skills to connect local actors and WROs/WLOs, and to empower other women in their communities. These women are open and eager to form connections with other women to support one another and to advance the meaningful participation and representation of women in WASH Coordination and the sector overall.

To do so, women need specific supports. The seven recommendations that the respondents suggested were:

- Deepen the applicant pool with intentional recruitment efforts,
- Write job descriptions that encourage women to apply,
- Increase acceptance of women into WASH positions,
- Improve working conditions for women related to childcare,
- Improve access to educational and training opportunities for women,
- Create a network of women for collaboration and support, and
- Streamline metrics/standards to guide efforts to increase the participation and representation of women in WASH Coordination and sector overall.

4 https://awl-ojs-tamu.tdl.org/awl/article/view/258

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It is important to note that not all of the recommendations the respondents provided are feasible for the UN and/or the Global WASH Cluster to implement. Some recommendations are societal and larger in nature (such as gendered expectations of childcare), and other recommendations are not in alignment with larger UN policies (such as paying women more), or not within the control of the GWC (such as recruiting practices). Respondents' conflicting views of positive discrimination in the recruitment process, and the balance of childcare responsibilities with work in humanitarian emergency zones, also highlight complexities in the recruitment process of women in the WASH sector. Yet, some recommendations are within the purview of the Global WASH Cluster. In particular, ideas such as increasing mentorship, capacity strengthening, and networking seem feasible and impactful at the GWC level. Additionally, simple strategies to ensure job descriptions attract more women (gender-neutral language, focus on skills instead of tools, discussion of family benefits, etc.) also seems feasible at the human resources, with support of GWC advcocay efforts. Another main goal of the GWC could also be to continue emphasizing and communicating the importance of a gender-balanced WASH sector, including coordination teams, to counter the pervasive biases and discrimination that inhibit women from thriving in WASH work.

It is of note that several respondents recommended publishing guidelines to guide women and WROs/WLOs to enter the WASH sector. However, these efforts are already present among the UN's Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) guidance on localization and the WASH clusters' work on the localization roadmap and UNICEFs WLO/WRO engagement plan. Respondents' lack of knowledge of existing resources reveals that more information dissemination on gender-balanced initiatives in coordinationcould be of utility.

This study does have some limitations. As most interviews were not directly transcribed and analysis was instead performed on interviewer notes, there was a limited amount of direct respondent quotations and uncertainty in the completeness of the data. Relatedly, authors did not have access to original recordings of interviews to cross-check the accuracy of the interviewer notes. Additionally, English is not all respondents' main language, creating the opportunity for miscommunications and uncertainty of phrases during the interview and notetaking process, and in analysis. Lastly, the sample size was relatively small, and this is a snapshot of respondent opinion.

These limitations do not change the fact that this report is an important foundational document describing the experiences of women in the humanitarian WASH sector. This report provides an initial overview of barriers and potential facilitators for women to remain within or enter the humanitarian WASH sector, filling a key gap in the existing knowledge base. However, much remains to be done, both in research and in understanding how to incorporate recommendations from respondents into systemic change at various levels.

Overall, as seen across STEM fields, women face barriers throughout their careers in WASH in humanitarian response and coordination, from entry into the workforce to preserving their power and respect. Women in coordination and WROs/WLOs continuously face discrimination stemming from historical biases against women that deem them unfit to get involved in WASH coordination or programming. Yet, women and WLO/WROs have skills, knowledge, and first-hand experiences that make them crucial voices and powers in influencing WASH decisions. It is hoped that this report helps in continuing to identify and develop recommendations to implement to improve the experiences and success, and therefore the impact, of the role of women and WLO/WROs in humanitarian WASH Coordination Platforms.

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WASH Cluster
Water Sanitation Hygiene

Cluster Advocacy and Support Team

Global WASH Cluster
UNICEF

Route des Morillons 4
CH-1202 Geneva
Switzerland

globalwashcluster@unicef.org
washcluster.net