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## Interview with Anita Birgitta Nilsson



**"The overall share of women in the nuclear field has been low. However, it is slowly increasing"**

### **What is the presence of women in the nuclear field, in general?**

In general, there are fewer women than men in the nuclear field, as in most scientifically oriented fields due to many interrelated factors. Traditional gender roles steer the lives of women in many societies. It has also been noted that in societies that value equal access to higher education for both men and women, the traditional roles of women as caregivers tend to guide them toward healthcare-related fields within the sciences.

The overall share of women in the nuclear field has been low. However, it is slowly increasing. Women head several national nuclear regulatory agencies and continue to study at the graduate level in physics and engineering.

Within the IAEA itself, the share of women holding Professional positions has increased

during the past decade-and-a-half from 12.6% in 1989 to over 20% in 2005. For the first time in the IAEA's history, a woman heads one of the Agency's six Departments. To further increase this ratio, the Secretariat has initiated several outreach activities, which have led to an increase in the number of applications from women to Agency posts. One of these new initiatives is to build a network with IAEA Member States that can be used in the recruitment process. Through the appointment of a "Point of Contact for the Recruitment of Women," institutions from where suitably qualified women candidates could be drawn will be identified and the word about the Agency's opportunities for young professionals will be spread. More information about the work of the IAEA in this area can be found on our website at <http://www.iaea.org/women>.

**When did these efforts to include the gender perspective within the International Atomic Energy Agency begin? And why?**

Among the first actions taken with regard to gender issues was the establishment of a policy on the equal treatment of women and men in the Secretariat. Later, in pursuit of achieving more balanced gender representation throughout the Secretariat, annual reporting on the status of women started in the early 1990s. The Director General now reports biennially to the IAEA Board of Governors on Personnel: Women in the Secretariat. Other gender mainstreaming actions have been pursued since the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 in order to implement the conference's Declaration and Platform for Action.

Efforts to create and enhance a more family-friendly work environment have been ongoing for many years. In cooperation with the city of Vienna, a childcare centre functions on the premises of the IAEA. Staff can take advantage of benefits such as fully paid maternity leave for up to four months, paternity leave, nursing breaks, part-time work arrangements, flexible working hours, work from home and home leave. The Agency's Learning Resource Centre provides career-development and job search support to spouses of staff members in order to help them find employment in Vienna.

**What is the main purpose of the Agency Focal Point for Gender Concerns?**

The institution of the Focal Point for Gender Concerns was first established in 1996. The Focal Point is responsible for promoting a supportive work environment and fostering the necessary changes in attitudes that lead to a climate conducive to the equal participation of men and women in the Agency. He/she monitors the progress made in the representation of women in Secretariat's staff, as well as the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action within the Agency. The Focal Point for Gender Concerns is also responsible for addressing specific gender-related concerns raised by men and women, and for recommending policy changes where appropriate.

As the Focal Point, I also represent the Secretariat in meetings with Member States when the topic is related to gender issues or the representation of women, acting for instance, as the liaison with and between the Points of Contact for the Recruitment of Women and the Secretariat. I listen to ideas from staff members regarding recruitment actions and work-environment improvements and advocate for changes within the Secretariat. I can also be contacted by anyone interested in gender issues at the IAEA through the website "Resources for Women" at [www.iaea.org/women](http://www.iaea.org/women).

**Is it difficult to move from a perspective that exclusively promotes an increase of women in the nuclear field towards a wider approach that analyses this field from a gender perspective?**

As there is a rather wide discrepancy between the representation of women and men at the Professional level within the Agency, my job as the Focal Point for Gender Concerns focuses much more on decreasing this difference than on analysing the work of the Agency from a gender perspective. The Agency makes a gender perspective central to a number of its activities, especially in the area of technical cooperation. Some of these projects are recognized for specifically aiming at improving the health and nutrition of women.

**Are there any other organizations that work on the issues of nuclear energy and gender? What approach do they maintain?**

One of the international organizations whose work is related to women in the nuclear field is "Women in Nuclear" (<http://www.world-nuclear.org/win-global/>). It is a professional association of women working in the nuclear field and its principal objective is to emphasise the role that women have in addressing the public's concerns about nuclear energy and the application of radiation and nuclear technology. WIN's country chapters provide networking and professional development opportunities to its members. Many other professional organizations for women in the sciences and the nuclear field also provide similar services at the national level.