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Item 8 (b) of the provisional agenda*

**Parallel meetings for an in-depth review of progress made,
peer-to-peer learning and acceleration measures regarding
the sub-themes of the Forum: gender equality**

Background report on the sub-theme of gender equality

I. Introduction

1. Sustainable Development Goal 5 is aimed at achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls by addressing systemic challenges to economic empowerment, including those that are a result of the existing policy, legislative and institutional frameworks, and by integrating women's voices into all decision-making processes. The Goal is intricately linked to strategic objective 6.3 of the second 10-year implementation plan (2024–2033) of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union, which is focused on promoting gender parity by increasing women's access to leadership positions, promoting entrepreneurship and making policies more gender-responsive.

2. The achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa would drive inclusive economic growth and sustainable development. With women making up over half of the continent's population, their full economic participation is essential to fostering inclusive growth and enhancing productivity. Furthermore, progress towards the achievement of Goal 5 will accelerate the attainment of other Goals, including Goal 1 (no poverty), Goal 3 (good health and well-being), Goal 4 (quality education) and Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth), underscoring the need for integrated policies and innovative solutions that leverage science and evidence to create inclusive and equitable societies.

3. Emerging challenges, such as the effects of climate change, economic instability, geopolitical tensions, global and regional conflicts, and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, have disproportionately affected women and girls, exacerbating existing inequalities. For instance, job losses and increased caregiving responsibilities during crises continue to have severe negative impacts on the economic participation of women. The present report contains an assessment of the progress made towards and challenges identified in achieving Goal 5 since the previous in-depth review,¹ which was completed in 2022, and recommendations for priority actions to accelerate the achievement of the Goal.

* ECA/RFSD/2025/1.

¹ ECA/RFSD/2022/6.



II. Progress made

4. Recent data and insights, in particular those gathered during the 30-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, indicate that, while significant progress has been made in advancing gender equality across the continent,² persistent and emerging challenges continue to hinder its full realization.³ Since 2015, Africa has made significant strides towards the achievement of Goal 5, in particular in reducing child marriage (indicator 5.3.1) and enhancing women's representation in leadership roles (indicators 5.5.1 and 5.5.2). At the current rate of progress, Africa will achieve Goal 5 by 2094.⁴

A. Ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

5. Discriminatory laws and societal norms can create significant barriers for women in gaining access to economic resources, property ownership and financial services, limiting their opportunities and hindering job creation and economic growth.

6. Despite the enactment of laws to eliminate discrimination and enhance women's rights across Africa, women still hold only about three quarters of the legal rights granted to men. As of 2022, only 16 countries had established robust legal frameworks that effectively promoted gender equality, while nearly 60 per cent lacked sufficient data on these issues.⁵

7. While progress has been made in providing women with equal opportunities to start businesses and gain access to property, discriminatory laws and entrenched cultural practices continue to hinder their ability to own property, gain access to credit and engage in economic activities on par with men. In 12 per cent of African countries, as of 2023, women were required to provide additional documentation or obtain a man's consent to open a bank account. Furthermore, in the same year, over 60 per cent of African countries did not offer substantial paid maternity leave, and just over half had enacted equal pay legislation (see figure I).

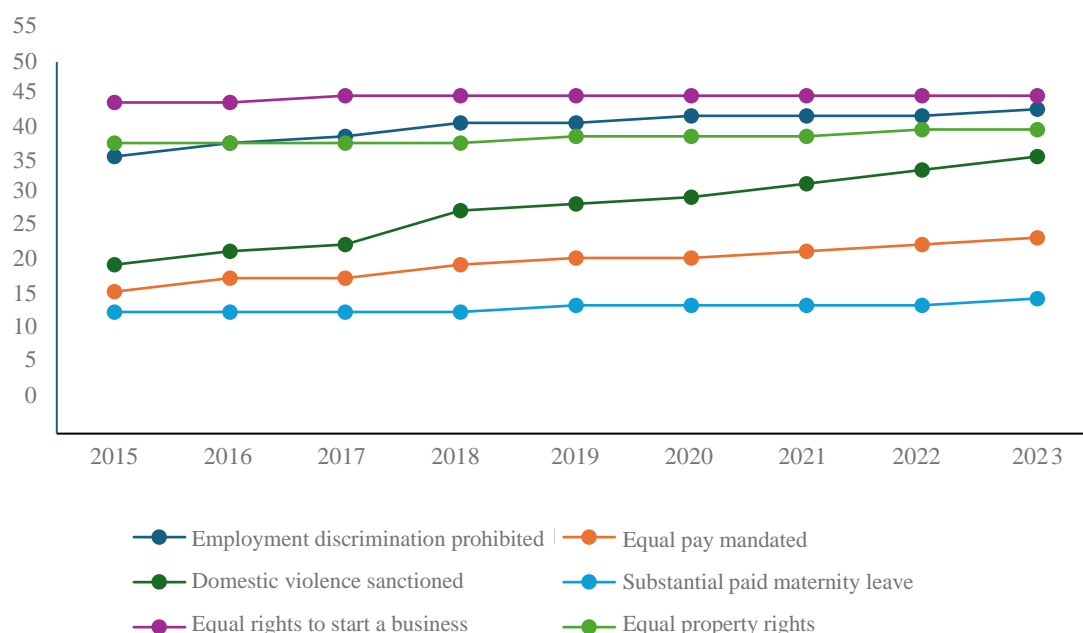
² African Development Bank and Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), *Africa Gender Index 2023 Analytical Report: African Women in Times of Crisis* (Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, and Addis Ababa, 2024).

³ ECA and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), "Africa regional review summary report: Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 2020–2024".

⁴ An overview of progress at the indicator level can be seen on the Africa UN Data for Development Platform: <https://ecastats.uneca.org/africaundata/SDGs/SDG-progress-2023>.

⁵ United Nations, "Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination", SDG Indicators Database. Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/database> (accessed on 15 December 2024).

Figure I
**Number of African countries with principal economic and social rights
 for women provided in legislation**



Source: ECA estimates, based on data from World Bank, “Data for 1971–2024”, Women, Business and the Law 1.0 Database. Available at <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/wbl-data> (accessed on 10 December 2024).

8. Of the 39 African countries that reported data for the 30-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 82 per cent have strengthened laws prohibiting discrimination against women in hiring and promotion, while 16 countries have implemented mechanisms to ensure women’s participation in economic decision-making bodies. In addition, 30 countries have adopted measures to combat discriminatory social norms and improve the access of girls to education and skills development. In 37 countries, the access of girls to quality education, skills development and training has improved.⁶ In line with the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, more than 30 countries have enacted policies allowing pregnant girls and teenage mothers to remain in school and continue their education without disruption.⁷

9. Despite these efforts, significant gaps in human capital development, employment opportunities, asset ownership and women’s agency persist. Women remain disproportionately represented in informal and precarious employment, in particular in agriculture and services, with limited job security. In 2022, 68 per cent of women were in vulnerable employment compared with 57 per cent of men.⁸ The gender wage gap further compounds disparities: in 2023, women earned an average of 21 per cent less than men in high-skilled

⁶ ECA and UN-Women, “Africa regional review summary report”.

⁷ Human Rights Watch, “Across Africa, many young mothers face education barriers: African Union guidance, policy reforms needed to ensure girls continue education”, 30 August 2022.

⁸ ECA estimates, based on data from World Bank, “Vulnerable employment (percentage of employment) (modelled ILO estimate)”, World Development Indicators database. Available at <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/sl-emp-vuln-zs> (accessed on 16 September 2024).

positions.⁹ Across sub-Saharan Africa, girls face lower completion rates in education than boys, owing to child marriage, early pregnancy and domestic responsibilities, with only 46 per cent completing lower secondary education and just 27 per cent finishing upper secondary education in 2023.¹⁰

10. Persistent gender disparities in workforce participation reflect a lack of legislation in some countries and ongoing challenges in enforcing gender equality laws. Although women's access to education has improved, women remain underrepresented in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics and in vocational training owing to societal norms and discriminatory practices.¹¹

B. Eliminating all forms of violence against and exploitation of women and girls

11. Violence against women and girls is a significant human rights violation and public health concern with profound economic repercussions. Empirical analyses show that a 1 percentage point increase in women experiencing gender-based violence can lead to an 8 per cent reduction in national economic activity.¹² Strong legislative measures can foster safer environments for women, which would enhance their economic participation, yet 13 African countries still lack legislation against domestic violence (see figure I).

12. The prevalence of intimate partner violence remains high in Africa, with significant regional variations. Just over 1 in 5 (20.4 per cent) women and girls aged 15 to 49 years in sub-Saharan Africa and 1 in 7 (14.7 per cent) in North Africa were subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in the previous year, a ratio that reaches 1 in every 3 women and girls in some countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo (35.6 per cent).¹³ In addition, non-partner sexual violence remains a critical issue, with many cases going unreported owing to stigma and fear of reprisal.¹⁴

13. Sexual violence against children remains a global concern. Sub-Saharan Africa bears the highest burden, with 79 million girls and women having been affected before they reached 18 years of age, and, in places with weak institutions or high numbers of refugees, the prevalence of rape and sexual assault in childhood exceeds 1 in 4.¹⁵ In fragile settings, the prevalence of sexual violence against girls is more than twice the global average.¹⁶

⁹ ECA estimates, based on data from International Labour Organization (ILO), "Gender wage gap by occupation", ILOSTAT. Available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/> (accessed on 16 September 2024).

¹⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "Completion rate", Visualising Indicators of Education for the World. Available at <https://education-estimates.org/completion/data/> (accessed on 24 January 2025).

¹¹ UNESCO, "Support girls and women to pursue STEM subjects and careers: advocacy brief", November 2024.

¹² Rasmané Ouedraogo and David Stenzel, "The heavy economic toll of gender-based violence: evidence from sub-Saharan Africa", International Monetary Fund Working Paper, No. WP/21/277 (Washington, D.C., International Monetary Fund, 2021).

¹³ United Nations, "5.2.1: Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months", SDG Indicators Database. Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/database> (accessed on 15 December 2024).

¹⁴ For more information, see the national reports in relation to the Africa regional review of 30 years of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: www.uneca.org/eca-events/beijing30/national-bpfa-review-reports.

¹⁵ "Over 370 million girls experienced rape, sexual assault before turning 18: UNICEF", *Firstpost*, 11 October 2024.

¹⁶ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "When numbers demand action: confronting the global scale of sexual violence against children" (New York, 2024).

14. African countries have made progress in combating violence against women and girls by implementing various strategies, as highlighted in the report on the 30-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Thirty-six countries have enhanced survivor support services, such as shelters and legal aid, while 35 have strengthened laws to prevent violence. Initiatives in 22 countries have focused on understanding the extent and consequences of the violence.¹⁷

15. Prevention has also been a main priority, with 34 countries implementing educational and community initiatives and 31 developing national action plans.¹⁸ The draft African Union convention on ending violence against women and girls, set for adoption in February 2025, demonstrates the commitment of African countries to combating gender-based violence.

16. Data collection has improved in 21 countries, including Liberia and Malawi, which have upgraded their infrastructure to support evidence-based responses to gender-based violence. Moreover, 37 countries are working to economically empower women, and 33 have engaged community leaders to advocate positive social norms.¹⁹

C. Eliminating all harmful practices, including child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

17. Harmful practices marginalize women and girls, negatively affect their health, and restrict their access to education and employment, diminishing their economic contributions and perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality.

18. Despite the enactment of stricter laws, the allocation of funds and the implementation of community-based interventions in various countries to combat female genital mutilation, the practice persists in certain areas owing to entrenched cultural norms and its medicalization. In 2022, 34.6 per cent of girls aged 15 to 49 years in sub-Saharan Africa had undergone female genital mutilation,²⁰ with Somalia and Guinea reporting the highest rates at 99.2 per cent and 94.5 per cent, respectively, in 2024.²¹

19. Child marriage remains widespread despite being outlawed in many African countries, with 130 million women and girls in Africa married before the age of 18 years as of 2023,²² and 31 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 years in sub-Saharan Africa having been married or having entered into a union before the age of 18 years.²³ If current trends persist, sub-Saharan Africa is projected to see a growing relative share and increasing number of child brides, with 20 million more girls in East and Southern Africa projected to marry during childhood in the next decade.²⁴

¹⁷ ECA and UN-Women, “Africa regional review summary report”.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ UNICEF, “Cross-sector indicators”, UNICEF Data Warehouse. Available at https://data.unicef.org/resources/data_explorer/unicef_f/?ag=UNICEF&df=GLOBAL_DATAFLOW&ver=1.0&dq=PT_F_15-49_FGM+PT_M_15-49_FGM_ELIM+PT_F_0-14_FGM+PT_F_15-49_FGM_ELIM..&startPeriod=2016&endPeriod=2023 (accessed on 20 December 2024).

²¹ Ibid.

²² UNICEF, *Towards Ending Harmful Practices in Africa: a Statistical Overview of Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation* (New York, 2022).

²³ UNICEF, “Child marriage”, UNICEF global databases. Available at https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/XLS_Child-marriage-database_May-2024.xlsx (accessed on 20 December 2024).

²⁴ UNICEF, *Child Marriage in Eastern and Southern Africa: a Statistical Overview and Reflections on Ending the Practice* (New York, 2022).

D. Recognizing and valuing unpaid care and promoting shared domestic responsibilities

20. Unpaid care work is crucial for the economy and human well-being, yet it remains overlooked and undervalued in the African socioeconomic landscape and gross domestic product metrics.²⁵ Women across Africa still shoulder a disproportionate burden of unpaid work; they spend 249 minutes per day on unpaid care work, while men spend 87 minutes. In contrast, men spend 275 minutes on paid work, compared with 184 minutes for women.²⁶ These disparities affect women's economic and political participation and contribute to persistent gender earning gaps.

21. Closing care policy gaps and expanding decent care services could create nearly 300 million jobs by 2035, which would significantly reduce gender inequalities in employment and yield substantial economic and social returns.²⁷ In some instances, between 75 and 90 per cent of new jobs would benefit women.²⁸

22. Parental leave policies remain limited, however, with only 57 per cent of African countries offering 14 weeks of government-supported leave and just 31 per cent providing full maternity benefits.²⁹ Similarly, although 34 countries offered paid leave to fathers in 2023, non-monetary contributions, such as unpaid care work, remain unrecognized in economic valuation in over 40 per cent of African countries.³⁰

23. Public spending on care policies in Africa remains minimal, with social protection expenditure in 2020 accounting for 3.8 per cent of gross domestic product, compared with the global average of 12.9 per cent.³¹ This underinvestment leaves just 30.6 per cent of the working-age population with legal coverage – women's coverage trailing men's by 8 percentage points³² – and few countries funding essential care services, such as early childhood education.³³

24. Despite slow progress, African countries have advanced in recognizing unpaid care work through transformative care policies,³⁴ with Algeria, the Congo and Kenya implementing paid maternity leave, and Egypt, Morocco and South Africa providing unemployment benefits. Côte d'Ivoire, Namibia, Senegal and South Africa have special grants for domestic workers and vulnerable groups. In addition, 34 countries have expanded cash transfer programmes for women, 25 have enhanced caregiver assistance and 20 have made childcare more affordable, while, through legal reforms, 12 countries

²⁵ Diane Elson, "Labor markets as gendered institutions: equality, efficiency and empowerment issues", *World Development*, vol. 27, No. 3 (March 1999).

²⁶ *Intergenerational Relations: Creating a World for All Ages So That No One Is Left Behind* (United Nations publication, 2024).

²⁷ ILO, *Care at Work: Investing in Care Leave and Services for a More Gender Equal World of Work* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2022).

²⁸ See, for example, UN-Women, *Investing in Free Universal Childcare in Sub-Saharan Africa: Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal and the United Republic of Tanzania – Estimating Spending Requirements, Gendered Employment Effects and Fiscal Revenue*, Issue paper (New York, 2021).

²⁹ ECA estimates, based on data from World Bank, "Data for 1971–2024", Women, Business and the Law 1.0. Available at <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/wbl-data> (accessed on 10 December 2024).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ ILO, *African Regional Social Protection Strategy, 2021–2025: towards 40 Per Cent – a Social Protection Coverage Acceleration Framework to Achieve the SDGs* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2021).

³² ECA and UN-Women, "Africa regional review summary report".

³³ Kelsey Harris, Kehinde Ajayi and Astha Mainali, "Childcare and early childhood development expenditures in Africa: comparative policy insights for advancing women's economic empowerment", Policy Paper, No. 349 (Washington, D.C., Centre for Global Development, 2024).

³⁴ ECA and UN-Women, "Africa regional review summary report".

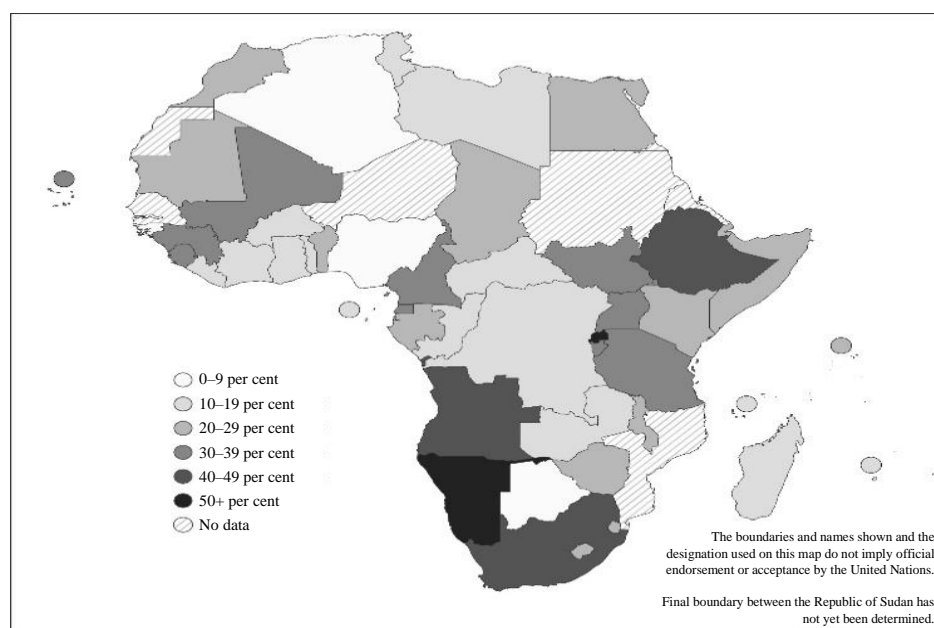
have recognized the economic value of household work, and 11 have advocated better conditions for paid care workers. Eight countries have integrated unpaid care work into national statistics, while 13 have invested in infrastructure to reduce the workloads of caregivers. Furthermore, 26 countries have strengthened parental leave policies, and over half of 39 reporting African countries have launched campaigns to engage men and boys in unpaid care work.³⁵

E. Ensuring women's full and effective participation in leadership and decision-making

25. Empowering women in leadership brings diverse perspectives, enhances decision-making processes and promotes inclusive policies, thereby driving job creation and supporting sustainable development. Despite some progress being made in integrating women into political and public spheres, advancements across Africa have been slow and uneven. In 2023, women held 26 per cent of parliamentary seats, up from 19 per cent in 2015,³⁶ and only 36.3 per cent of managerial positions,³⁷ despite constituting 53.5 per cent of the labour force.³⁸ Only Namibia has achieved gender parity in national parliaments (see figure II), highlighting the need for sustained efforts to enhance women's participation in decision-making across the continent.

Figure II

Percentage of seats in lower or single chambers of legislature in Africa held by women, 2024



Source: ECA estimates, based on data from Inter-Parliamentary Union, “Monthly ranking of women in national parliament”, IPU Parline. Available at https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking/?date_year=2024&date_month=12 (accessed on 10 December 2024).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union, “Monthly ranking of women in national parliament”, IPU Parline. Available at https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking/?date_year=2024&date_month=12 (accessed on 10 December 2024).

³⁷ ILO, “SDG Labour Market Indicators (ILOSDG)” ILOSTAT data explorer. Available at https://rshiny.ilo.org/dataexplorer37/?lang=en&id=SDG_T552_NOC_RT_A (accessed on 7 March 2025).

³⁸ ILO, “The impact of care responsibilities on women's labour force participation”, Statistical Brief, October 2024.

26. African countries have increasingly implemented initiatives to enhance women's political participation, including skills development programmes, improved data-collection methods and capacity-building programmes for emerging leaders. Twenty-five of the countries that provided data for the 30-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action have adopted temporary special measures, such as gender quotas, to improve women's representation. For example, in 2023, Sierra Leone enacted a law mandating a 30 per cent quota for women candidates. While some countries, including Namibia and Rwanda, have successfully increased representation through quotas, others, such as Lesotho, Mali and Somalia, struggle with implementation owing to patriarchal systems. Nonetheless, 12 countries have strengthened measures to support women in politics, with Cabo Verde enforcing a 40 per cent minimum representation for women and 18 countries introducing initiatives to combat violence against women in politics.³⁹

F. Ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights

27. Access to sexual and reproductive health services improves women's health by reducing maternal mortality and morbidity, resulting in healthier, more productive women who contribute to the workforce and economic growth. When women control their reproductive health, they can better balance careers and family life, which enhances job stability and economic contributions.

28. Women's access to reproductive health and rights remains uneven across the continent. In sub-Saharan Africa, only 38 per cent of women aged 15 to 49 years who are married or in a union can make decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health rights, with significant disparities across countries.⁴⁰

29. While the recent increase in modern contraceptive use among women aged 15 to 49 years in Africa – from 23.4 per cent in 2015 to 26.5 per cent in 2024 – is commendable, the continent still ranks low globally in access to reproductive health and rights.⁴¹ The unmet demand for modern contraceptives has slightly declined, from 18.9 per cent to 17.9 per cent,⁴² and satisfied demand has risen from 55.3 per cent to 59.7 per cent.⁴³ As of 2023, Africa had the highest regional adolescent birth rate, at 4 births per 1,000 adolescent girls aged 10 to 14 years and 96 births per 1,000 adolescent girls and young women aged 15 to 19 years.⁴⁴ These figures highlight the persistent challenges in providing adequate reproductive health services and underscore the need for continued

³⁹ ECA and UN-Women, "Africa regional review summary report".

⁴⁰ ECA estimates, based on data from United Nations, "5.6.1: Proportion of women aged 15–49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive healthcare", SDG Indicators Database. Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/database> (accessed on 15 December 2024).

⁴¹ United Nations, "Contraceptive prevalence: Any modern method (Percent)", Population Division data portal. Available at <https://population.un.org/dataportal/data/indicators/2/locations/903,947/start/2015/end/2024/table/pivotbylocation?df=577bf5c8-c241-461d-9c3d-4e6ff2662d0b> (accessed 15 December 2024).

⁴² United Nations, "Unmet need for family planning: Any modern method (Percent)", Population Division data portal. Available at <https://population.un.org/dataportal/data/indicators/5/locations/903,947/start/2015/end/2024/table/pivotbylocation?df=577bf5c8-c241-461d-9c3d-4e6ff2662d0b> (accessed 15 December 2024).

⁴³ United Nations, "Demand for family planning satisfied by any modern method (Percent)", Population Division data portal. Available at <https://population.un.org/dataportal/data/indicators/8/locations/903,947/start/2015/end/2024/table/pivotbylocation?df=577bf5c8-c241-461d-9c3d-4e6ff2662d0b> (accessed 15 December 2024).

⁴⁴ WHO, "Adolescent birth rate (per 1000 women)", Data. Available at <https://data.who.int/indicators/i/24C65FE/27D371A> (accessed on 23 February 2025).

efforts to improve women's access to healthcare and address barriers to contraceptive use.

30. Many African countries are committed to improving access to sexual and reproductive health services for women and girls, as shown in the 30-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: 37 countries reported that universal healthcare was being expanded for marginalized populations. Efforts include a focus on sexual and reproductive health, mental health, maternal health and HIV care in 35 countries, with 22 having introduced gender-responsive training for healthcare providers and 21 having strengthened comprehensive sexuality education in national curricula. In addition, 31 countries have launched gender-specific public health campaigns, while 26 indicated that they are promoting male involvement in reproductive health. Some countries, including Burundi, Cameroon and Rwanda, are updating their national development plans to improve services related to adolescent pregnancies and maternal health, exemplified by the strategic HIV/AIDS plan of Ethiopia and the technological innovations being carried out in Rwanda.⁴⁵

31. Several African countries are making progress in enhancing legal and policy frameworks to improve women's access to reproductive health and rights. On average across the 23 countries in Africa with available data, 72 per cent of the laws and regulations necessary to ensuring full and equal access to sexual and reproductive health rights have been enacted. However, significant regional disparities exist, highlighting the need for targeted efforts to strengthen legal frameworks across the continent to ensure equitable access to reproductive health services for women.⁴⁶

G. Undertaking reforms to ensure women's equal rights to economic resources, property ownership and financial services

32. Strengthening women's right to economic resources is crucial to improve their economic security, foster job creation and promote entrepreneurship, which would result in economic stability and growth. Secure land rights enable women to gain access to credit, plan long-term investments and reduce financial risks.⁴⁷

33. Since 2015, several countries have increased awareness and advocacy efforts and enacted laws that guarantee women's equal rights to inherit and own property, in alignment with Goal 5 and the goals of Agenda 2063. In the 30-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 21 countries reported improvements in women's land rights and tenure security.⁴⁸

34. Despite these efforts, only 15 per cent of landholders in sub-Saharan Africa are women,⁴⁹ with ownership rates ranging from 1 per cent in Mali to 73 per cent in Ethiopia (see figure III). Gender disparities are also notable, with gaps ranging from -52 per cent in Malawi to 429 per cent in the Niger.⁵⁰ The disparity in land ownership limits women's ability to use property as collateral,

⁴⁵ ECA and UN-Women, "Africa regional review summary report".

⁴⁶ ECA calculation based on United Nations, "5.6.2: Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men aged 15 years and older to sexual and reproductive healthcare, information and education", SDG Indicators Database. Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/database> (accessed on 15 December 2024).

⁴⁷ Ruth Meinzen-Dick and others, "Women's land rights as a pathway to poverty reduction: framework and review of available evidence", *Agricultural Systems*, vol. 172 (June 2019).

⁴⁸ ECA and UN-Women, "Africa regional review summary report".

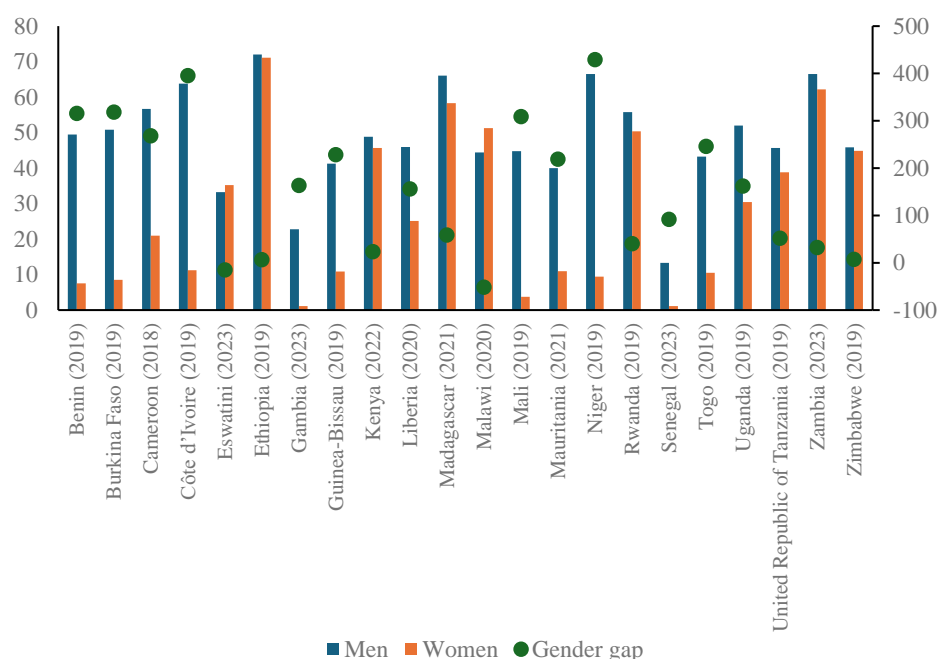
⁴⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010–2011: Women in Agriculture – Closing the Gender Gap for Development* (Rome, 2011).

⁵⁰ Gender gap = ((percentage of men with landownership rights – percentage of women with landownership rights)/percentage of men with landownership rights) * 100.

restricting their access to capital for businesses. The gender gap in financial inclusion across Africa ranges from 1 per cent in Rwanda⁵¹ to 26 per cent in Angola,⁵² underscoring the need to dismantle cultural and legal barriers.

Figure III

Agricultural population with land rights by sex (left axis) and gender gap (right axis), African countries with data
(Percentage)



Source: ECA, based on data from United Nations, “5.a.1: Proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land”, SDG Indicators Database. Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/database> (accessed on 18 December 2024).

Note: Gender gap = ((percentage of men with landownership rights – percentage of women with landownership rights)/percentage of men with landownership rights) * 100.

H. Promoting the empowerment of women through technology

35. Leveraging technology to connect women with resources, networks and training enhances their economic participation and fosters inclusive job markets. Digital platforms support women entrepreneurs with tools for business creation and growth, contributing to economic diversification and job creation.

36. While mobile phone ownership and Internet usage among women and men in Africa increased between 2021 and 2024, notable gender gaps persist (see figures IV and V). The average gender gap in mobile phone ownership and Internet usage narrowed over that period, from 22.4 per cent and 33.2 per cent

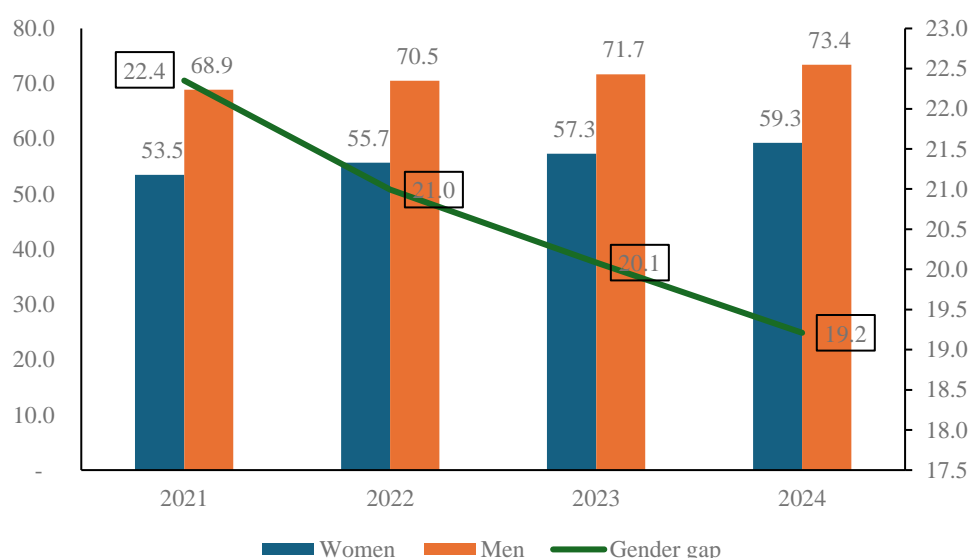
⁵¹ Access to Finance Rwanda, *FinScope 2024* (Kigali, 2024).

⁵² National Bank of Angola, *FinScope Consumer Survey 2022* (Luanda, 2023).

in 2021 to 19.2 per cent and 27.6 per cent in 2023, respectively.⁵³ This gender digital divide restricts women's access to technology and their ability to improve their digital skills, thereby limiting their full participation in the digital economy and hindering progress towards gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

Figure IV

Mobile phone ownership in Africa by gender (left axis) and gender gap (right axis)
(Percentage)

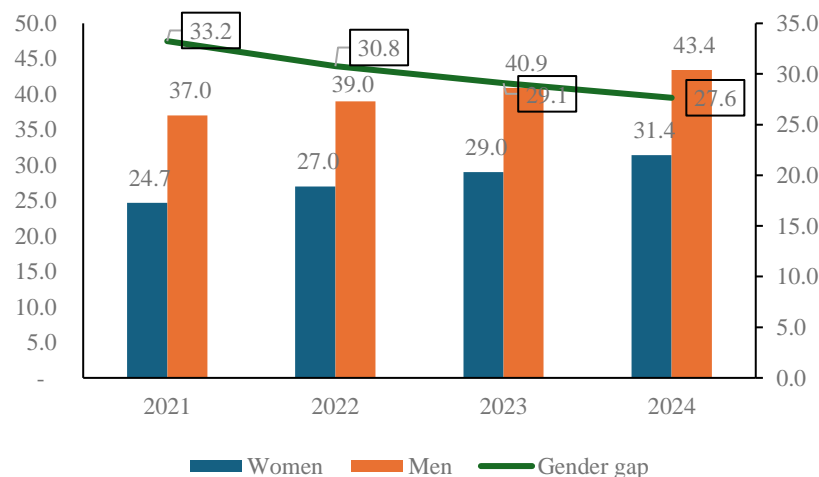


Source: ECA, based on data from International Telecommunication Union, “Global and regional ICT data”. Available at www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx (accessed on 7 March 2025).

Note: Gender gap = ((Percentage of men owning – percentage of women owning)/percentage of men owning) * 100.

⁵³ ECA, based on data from International Telecommunication Union, “Individuals owning a mobile phone by gender”, ITU DataHub. Available at www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx (accessed on 7 March 2025).

Figure V
Internet usage in Africa by gender (left axis) and gender gap (right axis)
 (Percentage)



Source: ECA, based on data from International Telecommunication Union, “Global and regional ICT data”. Available at www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx (accessed on 7 March 2025).

Note: Gender gap = ((Percentage of men using – percentage of women using)/percentage of men using) * 100.

37. Members of ECA have made notable progress in addressing the gender digital divide. Of the countries that reported data for the 30-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 30 have initiatives in place to enhance women’s digital literacy, while 27 promote gender-responsive science, technology, engineering and mathematics education. In addition, 24 countries have integrated gender inclusion into national development plans; examples include the national digital strategy of the Congo for 2025 and the national digital economy policy of Mali. Supportive environments for women’s digital learning have been established in 21 countries, with 19 focused on removing barriers in access to digital tools.⁵⁴

38. To improve connectivity, 14 countries have launched universal access programmes, including community information centres in Zimbabwe and a project to reduce the gender digital divide in Senegal. Furthermore, 26 members of ECA have introduced initiatives to equip girls with essential digital skills, with Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania implementing such programmes as science, technology, engineering and mathematics boot camps. Despite the efforts to foster gender equality in the digital economy, further actions are needed to close the gender digital divide and ensure online safety for women and girls, as technology-facilitated gender-based violence poses a growing threat.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ ECA and UN-Women, “Africa regional review summary report”.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

I. Adopting and strengthening policies and enforceable legislation for gender equality

39. Many African countries have enacted laws to promote gender equality, including those addressing gender-based violence, discrimination and harmful practices. Of the 39 African countries that provided data for the 30-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 36 have developed national strategies or action plans for gender equality based on human rights mechanisms of the United Nations, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review.⁵⁶

40. Many countries continue to face challenges in collecting and analysing data on gender equality policies, which hinders progress tracking and resource allocation. As found in the 30-year review, 30 African countries had defined national indicators for monitoring progress towards the achievement of the Goals and had started to collect gender-specific data. Only 23 countries had systems to track and make public national budget allocations towards women's empowerment, and 16 had yet to adopt gender-responsive budgeting.⁵⁷

III. Challenges and emerging issues

41. Despite progress in reducing child marriage and increasing women's representation in leadership, Africa is not on track to meet most Goal 5 targets, leaving gender equality a distant goal.

42. Members of ECA have made progress in promulgating laws and policies and ratifying international treaties to support women's access to justice, economic resources, employment and decision-making positions. However, human and financial resource constraints, weak accountability and reporting systems, inadequate coordination among government entities and relevant stakeholders, and entrenched cultural beliefs hinder the effective implementation and enforcement of gender equality laws.

43. Discriminatory laws and regressive social norms perpetuate the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, limit women's access to economic and digital resources, and hinder their opportunities for political and managerial roles, contributing to persistent gender pay gaps, occupational segregation, and restricted access to financial resources, property rights and markets.

44. Austerity measures, driven by tightening fiscal space and declining government revenues, disproportionately affect women and girls by pushing many into poorly paid and informal jobs and increasing the burden of unpaid care work.

45. Women's representation in political and decision-making processes remains limited in many African countries, reducing their influence over policies and budgetary allocations that affect their economic rights and opportunities.

46. Limited access to vocational training and skills development restricts women's ability to engage in decent employment and high-skilled occupations despite significant progress in the enrolment of girls in all levels of education.

47. Deep-rooted cultural and discriminatory social norms, in particular patriarchal beliefs, hinder lawmakers and community leaders from implementing and enforcing gender-transformative policies, which perpetuates

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

discrimination and violence against women and girls while restricting their access to economic resources and reproductive health rights.

48. The growing backlash against gender equality has significantly impeded progress and even reversed the advances made towards the achievement of Goal 5.⁵⁸ The introduction in 2024 of a bill to repeal the law banning female genital mutilation in the Gambia underscores the urgent need for coordinated advocacy between civil society and entities of the United Nations system to combat the rising threats against the rights of women and children, in particular regarding female genital mutilation and child marriage.

49. Gender-based violence, exacerbated by conflicts, climate shocks, the technological divide and socioeconomic instability, remains pervasive across Africa, with harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation and child marriage, continuing to occur despite notable declines in some countries.

50. Persistent challenges in producing, analysing and disseminating disaggregated high-quality data impede monitoring, accountability and reporting related to gender equality commitments, which makes integrating women's perspectives into policies and decision-making processes challenging.

IV. Key messages and recommendations

51. To fully achieve Goal 5 by 2030, Governments, working closely with critical partners, including civil society organizations, the private sector, the media, traditional leaders and United Nations entities, must prioritize the following actions:

- (a) Eliminate discriminatory laws and transform discriminatory gender norms and harmful cultural practices;
- (b) Strengthen women's participation in the economy;
- (c) Increase the participation of women in public and political life;
- (d) Combat violence against women and girls;
- (e) Integrate a gender perspective into statistical systems;
- (f) Implement gender-responsive budgeting and improve resource allocation to gender-responsive initiatives;
- (g) Improve intergovernmental coordination to meet gender equality commitments.

52. To drive meaningful change in job creation and economic growth in Africa, Governments must prioritize the elimination of discriminatory laws and practices and the enforcement of gender equality statutes. Increasing institutional support, allocating resources, building necessary capacities and conducting awareness campaigns to challenge harmful social norms are essential to translating legal protections into tangible change.

53. Policies that reduce, recognize and redistribute the unpaid care and domestic work burden on women are essential to facilitating their meaningful participation in the formal workforce and increasing their representation in managerial positions. Governments should prioritize the provision of affordable, accessible and high-quality care services, implement fair parental leave policies for mothers and fathers, and incorporate the value of unpaid care work into national statistical accounts.

54. The participation of women and adolescent girls in decision-making remains low, limiting their influence on policies that affect their economic rights. Investing in leadership training and mentorship, strengthening gender

⁵⁸ See A/HRC/56/51.

quotas in elections and safeguarding civic spaces are crucial to increasing women's representation. In addition, protecting defenders of rights of women and girls and fostering community engagement to promote the acceptance of women's leadership is essential for meaningful change.

55. Improving the access of women and girls to mobile phones and Internet connectivity can unlock vital resources and economic opportunities, which would foster sustainable development across Africa. To create an inclusive digital landscape, it is essential to invest in infrastructure, make handsets affordable, enhance literacy and digital skills, and address safety concerns. Public-private partnerships can drive innovation and facilitate investment in education and vocational programmes tailored to women, empowering them to enter high-demand sectors.

56. To effectively combat violence against women and girls in all areas, including online spaces, and achieve gender equality, Governments must strengthen policies on domestic violence and implement comprehensive policies on, for example, strengthening the social service workforce, investing in shelters and resources for survivors, prioritizing the protection of women and girls, and carrying out community-based programmes to educate and engage men and boys to foster sustainable change.

57. The absence of legal frameworks and restricted land rights for women undermine their economic independence and slow progress towards gender equality. Governments should enact laws that guarantee property and inheritance rights for women and girls, ensure accessible legal recourse for discrimination, establish land title programmes under which women's ownership and control are recognized, and conduct community education to raise awareness of women's economic rights.

58. Governments should also prioritize the availability of reliable disaggregated data on Goal 5 indicators, such as those related to gender-based violence, unpaid care work and harmful practices, to understand their prevalence and impact and to design evidence-based policies. A comprehensive approach that strengthens statistical capacity and systems for gender-specific indicators is critical to addressing these challenges.

59. Countries must establish mechanisms to ensure adequate financing for gender-responsive initiatives. In addition, robust partnerships and collaborations among Governments, civil society organizations, research institutions and the private sector are needed to leverage expertise, resources and networks for the effective implementation of gender-responsive interventions.