



Gender

Introduction

Kouassi Yeboua and Jakkie Cilliers

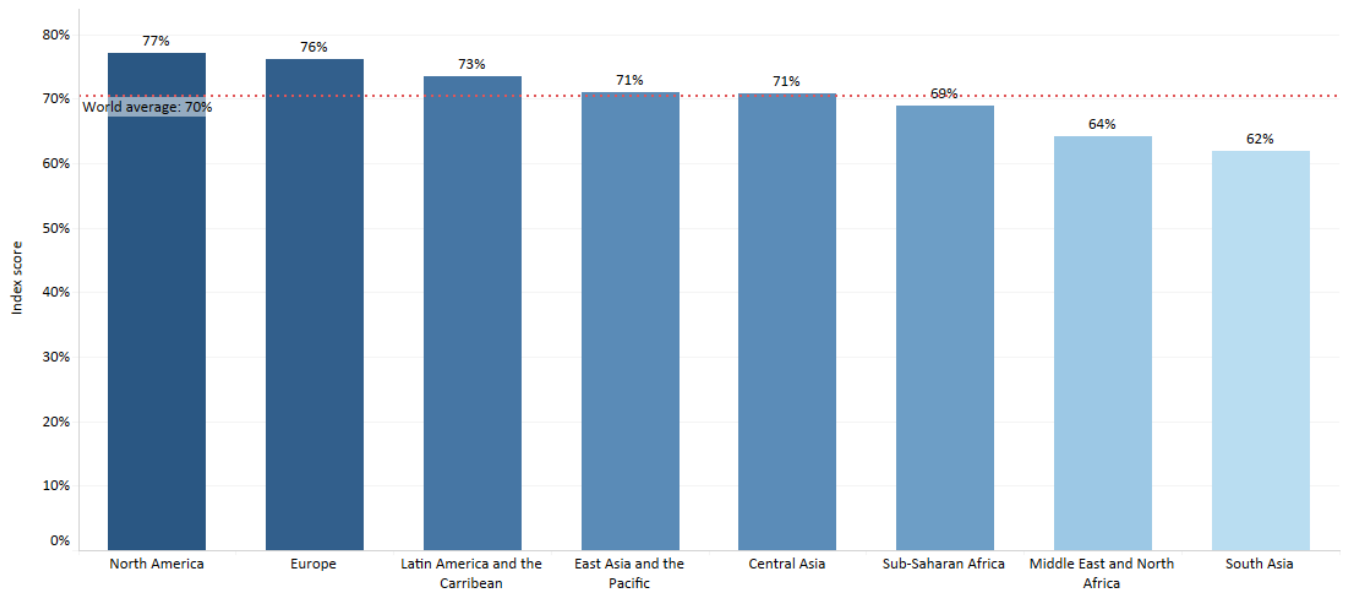
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Introduction

Gender inequality refers to the disadvantage that one gender has compared to another regarding access, opportunities and representation in the social, economic and political spheres, including the share in decision-making power at all levels. It also refers to disadvantage among the group of women and disadvantage among the group of men.[1]

No country or region has achieved full gender parity, although some countries and regions have made more progress than others (Chart 1). Recent shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated economic crisis, seem to have reversed progress towards parity. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),[2] most regions, including all regions in Africa, experienced a decline in their Gender Inequality Index score from 2019 to 2021.

Chart 1: Gender Gap Index per region, 2022



Source: World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Index, 2022.

Similarly, the UNDP 2023 Gender Social Norms Index report found no improvement in biases against women in the last decade. About half of the world's people still think men make better political leaders than women, and more than 40% think men make better business leaders than women, while 25% think it is justified for a man to beat his wife.[3]

Africa has made significant progress in adopting several protocols and directives that are aimed at achieving gender equality. At the international level, they include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979); the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995); the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325 adopted in 2000);[4] the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which includes provisions addressing gender-based crimes, such as rape, sexual slavery, and forced pregnancy, as war crimes and crimes against humanity; and several International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions related to women's rights in the workplace, including Convention No. 100 on Equal Remuneration and Convention No. 156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities.

At the regional level, the list is equally impressive. It includes the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (1986); the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child[5] (ACRWC/the Charter); the Maputo Protocol to the African Charter

on the Rights of Women (2003); the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations (2009);[6] the 2004 Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA);[7] and the African Union Policy Framework on Gender Equality (2010).[8]

Likewise, the African Union's Agenda 2063, a master plan for 'the Africa we want', places gender equality at the forefront of the continent's vision. Among the seven aspirations outlined in the agenda, [Aspiration 6](#) and its related Goal 17 specifically focus on achieving full gender equality to enable a people-driven development for Africa.[9] Several regional bodies, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the East African Community (EAC) also have protocols on gender equality.

Despite this plethora of policies, protocols and conventions, achieving gender equality remains a distant prospect on the continent. For instance, sub-Saharan Africa is the worst-performing region in the UNDP's Gender Inequality Index.

According to a report by McKinsey,[10] Africa's overall gender parity stands at 0.58 (1 would be full parity). Given the current rate of progress, it could take 140 years for the continent to achieve full equality. This alarming forecast calls for drastic actions to address gender inequalities on the continent not only for its intrinsic value, i.e. to improve upon the well-being of all human beings, but also because of its potential economic benefits.

For instance, the 2016 UNDP Human Development Report indicates that the total annual economic losses caused by gender gaps in sub-Saharan Africa reached US\$95 billion between 2010 and 2014.[11] Also, the 2021 Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) Regional Report by the OECD estimates that discriminatory social institutions cost Africa the equivalent of 7.5% of its GDP in 2019.[12] These findings suggest that Africa could reap a substantial growth dividend if it fully uses the skills and talents of all its citizens—including its girls and women.

The literature has no clear-cut conclusion regarding the relationship between gender equality, growth and development. Even though most theoretical and empirical studies conclude that reducing gender gaps is associated with high economic growth, some studies claim that existing evidence is weak and hence cannot support the claim that policies aimed at reducing gender inequality promote economic growth.[13]

This theme models the impact of a more rapid reduction in gender inequalities in the social, economic and political spheres on development outcomes in Africa with a forecast horizon to 2043, the end of the third ten-year implementation plan of the African Union's Agenda 2063.

Despite the significant progress made in the area of policy and legislation and the ratification of international and regional conventions and commitments by African countries, gender inequalities persist as a significant social issue. They affect various aspects of life, including education, employment, political representation, healthcare and access to resources. The subsequent sections below provide an overview of the key gender inequalities and likely trends in a business-as-usual scenario (or Current Path forecast) across all African states. It serves as a departure point for the subsequent development of an ambitious scenario on reduced gender inequality and quantification of the associated impact. The analysis frequently compares Africa and sub-Saharan Africa to other developing regions to gauge the continent's progress on gender-related indicators.

Endnotes

1. K Crenshaw, *Why intersectionality can't wait*, *The Washington Post*, 24 September 2015.
2. UNDP, *Human Development Report 2021/2022: Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World*, 2022. The Gender Inequality Index is a composite measure of gender inequality using three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market.
3. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Gender Social Norms Index comprises four dimensions— political, educational, economic and physical integrity. It is constructed based on responses to seven questions from the World Values Survey, which are used to create seven indicators. The core index value measures the percentage of people with at least one bias, and a lower value indicates less bias. See: UNPD, *2023 Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI): Breaking down gender biases: Shifting social norms towards gender equality*, New York: UNDP, 2023.
4. The resolution focuses on women, peace, and security. It recognises the impact of armed conflict on women and highlights the importance of women's participation in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding efforts.
5. The ACRWC was adopted by the Organisation of African Unity on 11 July 1990 and came into force on 29 November 1999.
6. Adopted in 2009, this protocol complements the Maputo Protocol and focuses specifically on the protection and empowerment of women in conflict and post-conflict situations.
7. The SDGEA reaffirms the commitment of African leaders to promote gender equality on the continent. It calls for specific actions to address gender disparities and empower women in various sectors, including education, health and political participation.
8. This policy framework sets out guidelines and strategies for African Union member states to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in different areas of development.
9. African Union, *African Union priorities on gender equality and women's empowerment in Agenda 2063*, 28 July 2021.
10. McKinsey Global Institute, *The power of parity: Advancing women's equality in Africa*, 24 November 2019.
11. UNDP, *Africa Human Development Report: Accelerating gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa*, UN: New York, 2016.
12. OECD, *Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) Regional Report for Africa*, OECD Development Centre, 2021.
13. O Bandiera and A Natraj, *Does gender inequality hinder development and economic growth? Evidence and policy implications*, *The World Bank Research Observer*, 28: 2–21, 2013.

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About the authors

Dr Kouassi Yeboua is a senior researcher in African Futures and Innovation programme in Pretoria. He recently served as lead author on ISS studies on the long-term development prospects of the DR Congo, the Horn of Africa, Nigeria and Malawi. Kouassi has published on various issues relating to foreign direct investment in Africa and is interested in development economics, macroeconomics, international economics, and economic modelling. He has a PhD in Economics.

Dr Jakkie Cilliers is the ISS's founder and former executive director of the ISS. He currently serves as chair of the ISS Board of Trustees and head of the African Futures and Innovation (AFI) programme at the Pretoria office of the ISS. His 2017 best-seller *Fate of the Nation* addresses South Africa's futures from political, economic and social perspectives. His three most recent books, *Africa First! Igniting a Growth Revolution* (March 2020), *The Future of Africa: Challenges and Opportunities* (April 2021), and *Africa Tomorrow: Pathways to Prosperity* (June 2022) take a rigorous look at the continent as a whole.

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