Literacy by gender is mixed. Disaggregation of data by sex (see Figure 9b) revealed a gap between men and women in literacy rates for 28 countries with available data. Literacy rates in seven countries were 10–22 percentage points higher for men than for women in 2007. A further 12 countries also showed higher literacy rates for the male population, but within the lesser range of 1 to 7.5 percentage points. Although young men are generally more likely to be literate, in a number of countries the situation is reversed, for example in Liberia, Namibia, Swaziland, and Botswana, where the literacy rate is from 2 to 7.7 percentage points higher for women than for men. In Liberia and Namibia, this could be a manifestation of the consequences of conflict, while in Botswana and Swaziland, this could be due to the relative attractiveness of low-skilled mining work in South Africa. While this provides positive evidence on the empowerment of women, the social implications (for crime and violence, including violence against women, and conflict) of a large pool of illiterate young men needs to command significant policy attention. To secure the empowerment of women, it is also important to ensure that men are not disempowered in the process.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
Latest available data indicate that in 2007, African countries showed overall progress in gender equality and the empowerment of women. Gender parity in primary education is likely to be achieved by most countries. Unfortunately, parity decreases in secondary education, and the gap is widest in tertiary education. In primary and secondary education, the West African countries of The Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania, and Senegal made the greatest progress in achieving gender parity. In tertiary education, although data are scant, North Africa continues to lead the continent, as Tunisia and Algeria have significantly surpassed gender parity, to the extent that they now have more women than men enrolled in universities and colleges. Data remain scant for indicator 3.2, rendering it problematic to track and analyze progress in the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector.

The year 2009 witnessed a continuing upward trend in the proportion of women in African national parliaments, as was also the case in last year’s report. Rwanda, Angola, Mozambique, and South Africa lead the continent on this indicator. Rwanda, which has been the best performer over the past couple of years, increased its share of women parliamentarians by 7.8 percent between 2008 and 2009. Angola, which held elections in September 2008, improved women’s representation in its national parliament by 22.8 percent from its last election in September 1992. Similarly, between 1990 and 2009, the share of women in Mozambique’s parliament increased by 19.1 percent. Good progress was also made on this indicator in South Africa between 1994 and 2009.

Target 3A: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education no later than 2015
Indicator 3.1: Ratios of girls to boys in primary, secondary, and tertiary education
The analysis of the gender parity index at primary education level between 1991 and 2007 (see Figure 10) shows that of the 38 countries with

13 Burkina Faso, Chad, Benin, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Morocco, and Zambia (see Figure 9b).
available data, six (Eritrea, Swaziland, South Africa, Namibia, Madagascar, and Equatorial Guinea) have a slightly regressing index. Mauritius is the only country that managed to maintain gender parity for the period 1991–2007. Cameroon, Cape Verde, and Tanzania have not shown any changes in their gender parity levels. The remaining 28 countries have increased gender parity from 0.02 to 0.37 points. Guinea and The Gambia have managed to reduce gender disparity the most, by 0.37 and 0.35 points respectively, closely followed by Senegal and Mauritania. Although data for the baseline year of 1991 are not available, 2007 data reveal that Zambia, Seychelles, and São Tomé and Principe have achieved actual or near gender parity in primary schools. In 2007, The Gambia, Malawi, Mauritania, and Rwanda recorded a gender parity level above 1.0 in primary education, indicating that more girls than boys are enrolled in primary schools in these countries. The emerging policy challenge for some countries that have a gender parity index above 1.0 is to increase boys’ enrollment. Overall, if the current trends continue, most African countries will achieve gender parity in primary education by the target date.

While great strides have been made across the continent to achieve gender parity at primary education level, subregional comparison (see Figure 11) shows that Southern African countries, though closest to achieving parity, have made the least progress, with Swaziland, South Africa, Namibia, and Madagascar experiencing some regression. West African countries have made the greatest progress on this indicator, with The Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania, and Senegal as the best performers. At the subregional level, North Africa, East Africa, and Central Africa have demonstrated overall progress in achieving gender parity.

Figure 10: Gender parity index in primary education for selected African countries, 1991 and 2007

Source: ECA computations based on UNSD data, updated in July 2009.
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Figure 11: Gender parity index in primary education by African subregion, 1991–2007

The analysis of the gender parity index at secondary education level between 1991 and 2007 (see Figure 12) shows that of the 26 countries with available data, Ethiopia, Swaziland, Madagascar, South Africa, and Namibia have a regressing index, with South Africa showing the greatest regression at 0.13 points. The remaining 19 countries reduced gender disparity in the range of 0.03 to 0.4 points. The Gambia and Mauritania have managed to reduce gender disparity the most, by 0.4 points, closely followed by Malawi (0.37). Data for 2007 show that South Africa, Namibia, São Tomé and

Figure 12: Gender parity index in secondary education for selected African countries, 1991 and 2007
Príncipe, and Cape Verde have a gender parity level above 1.0 in secondary education, indicating that in these countries, more girls than boys are enrolled in secondary schools. With few African countries having achieved a gender parity index of 0.9 in 2007, if the current trends continue, it is highly unlikely that the continent as a whole will reach this target by 2015.

Many African countries fail to report on gender parity at the tertiary level, with only nine countries providing data for both 1991 and 2007 (Burkina Faso, Burundi, Ethiopia, Ghana, Madagascar, Malawi, Morocco, Tanzania, and Tunisia). Data for these nine countries (see Figure 13) show that all of them have reduced gender disparity, with Tunisia (0.85) the best performer, followed by Morocco (0.31) and Tanzania (0.29). In 2007, Cape Verde, Algeria, and Tunisia surpassed parity and recorded indices of 1.21, 1.4, and 1.51 respectively. This means that in those countries, women are much more likely than men to access tertiary level education. With the majority of African countries recording a gender parity index below 0.90 in 2007, and many still struggling to reach a gender parity index of 0.50, it is highly unlikely that African countries will reach this tertiary level target by 2015 if current trends continue.

**Indicator 3.2: Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector**

This indicator is one area that measures gender equality, but it is difficult to report on due to lack of data. Countries must make an effort to collect gender-disaggregated data. The available information (see Figure 14) shows Ethiopia (47 percent), the Central African Republic (47 percent), South Africa (44 percent) and Botswana (44 percent) to be the best performers on this indicator. On the other hand, countries like Senegal (11 percent), Liberia (11 percent), Algeria (15 percent), Libya (16 percent), and Egypt (18 percent) need to exert more effort to increasing women’s share in

**Figure 13: Gender parity index in tertiary education, for selected African countries, 1991 and 2007**

![Graph showing gender parity index in tertiary education, 1991 and 2007](image)

Source: ECA computations based on UNSD data, updated in July 2009.

paid employment in the non-agricultural sector. Figure 14 shows countries, in rank order, from the lowest to the highest, depending on year of data availability.

**Indicator 3.3: Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments**

Data reporting on this indicator is improving, with all 53 African countries providing data in 2009. Changes in women’s representation in national parliaments from the baseline year of 1990 to 2009 have been impressive. Of the 37 African countries with available data for both years (see Figure 15), 31 countries have increased the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women, although six countries (Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Egypt, and Cameroon) show a regression in that timeframe. As was the case in last year’s report, Rwanda proved to be the best performer on this indicator in 2009, with 56.3 percent of its parliamentary seats held by women, followed by South Africa (45.0 percent), Angola (37.3 percent), Mozambique (34.8 percent), and Uganda (30.7 percent). The remaining 26 countries that show improvements within this time period have less than 30 percent of seats held by women in national parliaments. Seventeen countries registered female participation below 10 percent in 2009.\(^\text{14}\) While overall trends for Africa on this indicator are positive, a minimum quota of women parliamentarians needs to be institutionalized, to safeguard the gains made in parliamentary gender parity for the future.

A common characteristic of the four leading countries on this indicator (Rwanda, South Africa, Angola, and Mozambique) is that they have emerged from conflict or civil war. Liberia, the only African country to have ever elected a female Head of State, emerged from a devastating civil war. While some of these countries are no longer considered

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\(^{14}\) These countries comprised (lowest ranking first): Egypt, Comoros, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, Congo, São Tomé and Príncipe, Algeria, Libya, Ghana, Madagascar, Guinea, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, and Kenya.
Figure 15: Percentage of seats held by women in national parliaments, 1990 and 2009


15 The parliament was dissolved following the December 2008 coup.
as postconflict or in transition, it appears that conflict environments allow for greater involvement of women in the political sphere. Several possible explanations for this phenomenon exist, one being that in times of severe turmoil, cultural norms and gender-based inequities are set aside for reasons of expediency. Countries in postconflict transition are perhaps more responsive to innovative ideas and donor influence in respect of gender empowerment and equality. Consequently, gender mainstreaming as part of the rebuilding process needs the support of the international community.

**Figure 16: Percentage of women in national parliaments, by African subregion, 1990–2009**

![Bar chart showing percentage of women in national parliaments by African subregion.](chart)

Source: ECA computations based on UNSD data as updated in July 2009.

**Figure 16** shows that four of the five subregions (Central Africa being the exception) saw overall improvements in the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments for the period 1990–2009. Southern Africa and East Africa emerged as the best performers in this respect. However, a closer look at the subregional trends shows that improvements were most significant in North, West, East and Southern Africa between 1990 and 2005, while Central Africa saw a sharp decline in the proportion of women holding parliamentary seats over the decade 1990–2000. The period from 2005 to 2009 indicates no progress in North Africa and a slight decline in Western Africa, but improvements in Central, East, and Southern Africa. An overview of subregional trends shows that Southern and East African women are more likely to attain leadership positions than their counterparts in West, Central, and North Africa.

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16 The definition of “postconflict” covers the period immediately after conflict, generally lasting about two years. During this period, partnerships with the international community are crucial in supporting or underpinning still fragile ceasefires or peace processes by helping to create conditions for political stability, security, justice and social equity (UNDG/ECHA definition 2004).