Ensuring women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making is one of the targets of the Agenda 2030 sustainable development goals. In addition to its intrinsic value, women’s participation is essential to the formulation of effective policies that respond to the differential needs of men and women. While Africa has made significant strides on women’s participation in decision-making spheres, surpassing Asia and the Pacific and the Middle East, the continental achievements hide national and subregional variations. This Fact Sheet provides a comparative perspective on the status of women’s representation in national parliaments.

Figure 1
Proportion of women in African parliament

Source: Statistical Archives of Interparliamentary Union, October 2018.

As of October 2018, 2,591 parliamentarians out of 11,037 in total are women, bringing the African average for the proportion of women in parliaments to 23 per cent. While this is commendable progress over time, it represents less than half the number needed to attain gender parity in African parliaments. Nonetheless, out of 35 countries with more than 33 per cent female representation in national parliaments across the world, nine are in Africa, including Rwanda (61 per cent), Namibia (46 per cent), South Africa (42 per cent), Senegal (42 per cent), Mozambique (40 per cent), Ethiopia (39 per cent), Tanzania (37 per cent), Burundi (36 per cent) and Uganda (34 per cent).

There is substantial variation across Africa as shown in figure 2. While Southern Africa is close to attaining the 33 per cent representation threshold, West Africa on average lags substantially behind other subregions. Out of 15 countries in West Africa, only five have over 15 per cent female representation in parliament. Senegal leads the way with 42 per cent female representation in parliament, ranking fourth in Africa. In Southern Africa, Namibia and South Africa are within reach of gender parity in parliament with 46 per cent and 43 per cent female representation, respectively. Mozambique is also close at 40 per cent.

**Figure 2**
**Subregional overview of female representation in African parliaments**

![Bar chart showing female representation in African parliaments by subregion.](source)

**Source:** Statistical Archives of Interparliamentary Union, October 2018.

In Eastern Africa, Rwanda leads the way with 61 per cent female representation in parliament ranking first among all African countries and across the world. Ethiopia, Tanzania, Burundi and Uganda follow suit with over 33 per cent female representation in parliament. In North Africa, Tunisia and Sudan are close to reaching the 33 per cent threshold while Egypt records the subregional minimum at 15 per cent female representation. Central Africa has a slightly higher average for women in parliament compared to West Africa. Cameroon has reached a subregional maximum of 31 per cent female representation in parliament.

**Figure 3**
**Historical evolution of women’s participation in African parliaments**

![Line chart showing historical trend of women's participation in African parliaments.](source)

**Source:** Statistical Archives of Interparliamentary Union, October 2018.
Since the adoption of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action at the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women, Africa has made steady progress on women’s participation in parliaments. Figure 3 shows that the average proportion of women in parliaments in Africa almost tripled over 22 years. However, progress has slowed since early 2010. In many African countries, the proportion of women in parliament must more than double its current levels to reach the 50 per cent gender parity target as set by Sustainable Development Goal 5, Target 5.5, Indicator 5.5.1.

Recent increases in the proportion of women in cabinet positions in some African countries, notably the achievement of gender parity in the cabinets of Ethiopia, Rwanda and Seychelles, offer a unique opportunity for African women to demonstrate how gender parity can improve the quality of governance, accelerate development and inspire the rest of the continent and the world. Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development with its specific target of ensuring women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making acknowledges the instrumental role of women’s participation in politics. This Fact Sheet provides a comparative perspective on the status of women’s representation in the executive branch of Governments in African countries.

Figure 4
Representation of women in African cabinets

Source: Interparliamentary Union (2017), French Diplomatie (2018) and focal points in ministries in Africa.

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3 The primary data source of this Fact Sheet is the Interparliamentary Union’s flagship report on “Women in Politics: 2017”. However, given the frequency of cabinet changes, ACG has contacted the Ministries of Gender across Africa to update the figures. When there was no response from a ministry, ACG obtained the latest updates from the country profiles of French Diplomatie reflecting the situation in 2018. (Available at [https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/)).
Figure 4 maps the proportion of women ministers in African cabinets. As of October 2018, there were 302 women ministers in Africa out of a total of 1,348 ministers. Consequently, women’s representation in African cabinets remain on average at 22 per cent which is less than half of the 50 per cent needed to attain gender parity.

Figure 5
Subregional overview of female representation in cabinets in Africa

![Subregional overview of female representation in cabinets in Africa](image)

Source: Interparliamentary Union (2017), French Diplomatie (2018) and focal points in ministries in Africa.

Figure 5 breaks down the African average into five subregions. Notably, Southern Africa at 28 per cent and Eastern Africa at 27 per cent are doing much better than West Africa (18 per cent) and North Africa (17 per cent). However, there is still a long way to gender parity in cabinets even in the top-performing subregions. For instance, Mauritius and Lesotho are lagging behind the average of Southern Africa with 9 per cent and 14 per cent female representation in their cabinets, respectively. In Eastern Africa, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti and Somalia have less than 15 per cent female representation in their cabinets. In North Africa, Mauritania leads the way with 30 per cent female representation in the cabinet while in Morocco only one female minister is present in the cabinet of 19 ministers. In West Africa, Mali leads the way with over 33 per cent female representation followed by Senegal with 26 per cent female representation.

Figure 6
Countries with over 33 per cent female representation in cabinets (2018)

![Countries with over 33 per cent female representation in cabinets](image)

Source: Interparliamentary Union (2017), French Diplomatie (2018) and focal points in ministries in Africa.

Globally, recent developments have increased the number of African countries attaining over 33 per cent female representation in their cabinets, as shown in figure 3. There are currently 7 African countries in the list of countries with over 33 per cent representation across the world. Consequently, Africa leads the developing world in female representation in cabinets, surpassing Latin America and the Caribbean.

\[\text{ACG updated the gender parity status in the cabinets of 20 non-African countries where female representation was over 33 per cent as of 1 January, 2017. Figure 6 excludes non-African countries which were below the 33 per cent threshold as of 1 January, 2017 but have surpassed it as of November 2018.}\]