



## Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, 1990-2005

### Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

The Millennium Declaration resolves to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as basic human rights. The Declaration also maintains that giving women their fair share is the only way to effectively combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable. Progress towards this goal is assessed by measuring gender equality in three areas: education, employment and political decision-making.

[How the indicators are calculated](#)

#### Gender equality as a prerequisite to achieving the other MDGs

Throughout the world women play a critical role in national economic growth and development. Their contributions have a lasting impact on households and communities, and it is women who most directly influence family nutrition and the health and education of their children. Giving women equal rights and opportunities can only serve to enhance this contribution and to bring us closer to the goal of eliminating poverty, hunger and disease.

Bridging the gender gap in education, for example – especially at the secondary level – is essential to developing skills and competencies necessary to compete in a global economy and to enable women to participate fully in public life. Reducing gender inequality in the labour market will increase women's economic security and contribute to economic development and growth. Furthermore, ensuring women's equal right to property and access to resources is fundamental to the fight against poverty. The full participation of women at all levels of decision-making is a basic human right, one that is critical to peace and development.

In other words, promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women is an effective strategy to ensure that the other Millennium Development Goals are achieved. Conversely, if women lack the education, influence and resources to care for their families and to fully participate in the development process, it is unlikely that the MDG targets can be met.

In assessing progress towards goal 3, it should be noted that the indicators used measure only certain aspects of reality (that is, gender equality in the spheres of education, work and political participation). True equality for women involves much more. Similarly, gender is a specific focus in three of the Millennium Development Goals – those concerning gender equality, maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS. However, governments and their partners must seriously and systematically consider the gender aspects of *all* the goals, or risk falling short of the mark.

## Target 4. Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2015

### Gender equality in education

Education, especially for girls, has social and economic benefits for society as a whole. Educated women have greater wage earning potential and more opportunities to participate in public life. They tend to marry later and to have fewer and healthier children who are more likely to go to school. Education for girls is also an effective prevention weapon against HIV.

*Seven out of 10 regions are close to parity in primary school enrolment*

Gender equality in primary school enrolment has been nearly achieved in seven out of ten regions in the developing world and the CIS, with a ratio of girls' to boys' enrolment of 93 per cent or higher. Southern Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and Western Asia lag behind, with ratios that remain low – from 85 to 89 girls per 100 boys – in spite of progress between 1990 and 2002. These regions will most likely miss the target of closing the gender gap by the end of 2005.

#### Gender equality indicators for education

Progress towards equality in education is measured for all three levels of education – primary, secondary and tertiary – based on the ratio of girls' gross enrolment ratio to boy's gross enrolment ratio.

Literacy among youth is monitored by the ratio of women's to men's literacy rates for the age group 15 to 24 years.

**Table 1. Ratio of girls' to boys' enrolment at the primary school level (GER, gender parity index, 1990-2001)**

Regions	Girls' gross enrolment ratio divided by boys' gross enrolment ratio (per 100)		
	1990/91	1998/99	2001/02
Developed regions	99	100	100
Commonwealth of Independent States, Europe	100	99	99
Commonwealth of Independent States, Asia	99	98	98
Northern Africa	82	90	93
Sub-Saharan Africa	83	84	86
Latin America and the Caribbean	98	98	98
Eastern Asia	93	101	100
Southern Asia	76	83	85
South-Eastern Asia	96	96	97
Western Asia	83	87	89
Oceania	90	95	93

Source: United Nations Statistics Division, "World and regional trends", Millennium Indicators Database, <http://millenniumindicators.un.org> (accessed June 2005); based on data provided by UNESCO.

Data for 1990/91-2001/02 indicate that the greatest progress was achieved in regions where the gap was widest – in Northern Africa, where the ratio of girls to 100 boys increased from 82 to 93, and in Southern Asia, where it increased from 76 to 85.

In a number of countries, progress has been exceptionally slow and girls are still at a large disadvantage. In general, these are countries where resources and school facilities are severely limited and total enrolment is low. In some of these countries, girls' enrolment ratios in primary school are 75 per cent or less that of boys'. (see Chart 1)

*Southern Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and Western Asia lag behind in primary as well as secondary education*

The gender gap in access to secondary education remains a serious concern in sub-Saharan Africa, Southern Asia and Western Asia, where there was little or no progress over the period 1998-2002. Ratios remain very low, with 79 girls enrolled per 100 boys. If this slow rate of progress continues in these regions, the target of eliminating the gender gap in secondary education by 2015 will be missed. A number of countries, the majority in sub-Saharan Africa, lag far behind, with girls' to boys' ratios as low as 46 in Benin. (see Chart 2)

In regions where enrolment is generally higher, the gender gap moves in the opposite direction, with more girls than boys enrolled in secondary school. This is the case in the developed regions, the European countries of the CIS, and Latin America and Caribbean, mainly due to a substantially higher drop out rate for boys.

**Chart 1. Countries where 75 or fewer girls for 100 boys are enrolled in primary education, 2001/02**

Gender parity index <sup>1</sup> in primary education	
Chad	63
Yemen	66
Central African Republic	67
Niger	68
Benin	70
Ethiopia	71
Burkina Faso	71
Côte d'Ivoire	74
Guinea	75
Mali	75

<sup>1</sup> See technical note at the end of the chapter for definition.

Source: United Nations Statistics Division, "World and regional trends", Millennium Indicators Database, <http://millenniumindicators.un.org> (accessed June 2005); based on data provided by UNESCO.

**Chart 2. Countries where fewer than 75 girls for 100 boys are enrolled in secondary education, 2001/2002**

Gender parity index in secondary education	
Benin	46
Equatorial Guinea	57
Cambodia	60
Djibouti	62
Ethiopia	62
Burkina Faso	65
Niger	65
Eritrea	65
Mozambique	66
Senegal	67
Gambia	71
Congo	71
Burundi	73
Lao People's Democratic Republic	73
India	74

Source: United Nations Statistics Division, "World and regional trends", Millennium Indicators Database, <http://millenniumindicators.un.org> (accessed June 2005); based on data provided by UNESCO.

**Table 2. Ratio of girls' to boys' enrolment at the secondary level, 1998-2002**

Regions	Ratio of girls' gross enrolment ratio to boys' gross enrolment ratio	
	1998/99	2001/02
Developed regions	101	102
Commonwealth of Independent States, Europe	n.a.	101
Commonwealth of Independent States, Asia	98	97
Northern Africa	94	96
Sub-Saharan Africa	81	79
Latin America and the Caribbean	109	107
Eastern Asia	n.a.	0.93 <sup>1</sup>
Southern Asia	74	79
South-Eastern Asia	96	98
Western Asia	76	79
Oceania	89	91

*1/ Data refer to 2000/2001.*  
*Source:* United Nations Statistics Division, "World and regional trends", Millennium Indicators Database, <http://millenniumindicators.un.org> (accessed June 2005); based on data provided by UNESCO.

#### *Gender gap in tertiary education favours girls in two out of three countries*

The gender gap in access to tertiary education reverses itself in the developed regions: there, 124 girls are enrolled for every 100 boys. In Latin America and the Caribbean, South-Eastern Asia and the European countries of the CIS, gender disparities also favour girls, with girls' enrolment in tertiary education higher than that of boys.

**Table 3. Ratio of girls' to boys' enrolment at tertiary level, 1998-2002**

Regions	Ratio of girls' gross enrolment ratio to boys' gross enrolment ratio	
	1998/99	2001/02
Developed regions	119	124
Commonwealth of Independent States, Europe	127	130
Commonwealth of Independent States, Asia	98	98
Northern Africa	68	82
Sub-Saharan Africa	62	68
Latin America and the Caribbean	102	114
Eastern Asia	n.a.	n.a.
Southern Asia	67 <sup>1</sup>	71
South-Eastern Asia	100	105
Western Asia	84	86
Oceania	64	n.a.

*1/ Data refer to 1999/2000.*  
*Source:* United Nations Statistics Division, "World and regional trends", Millennium Indicators Database, <http://millenniumindicators.un.org> (accessed June 2005); based on data provided by UNESCO.

In developing regions as a whole, 80 girls are enrolled for every 100 boys. The widest gap is in sub-Saharan Africa, where only 68 girls for every 100 boys are enrolled in university or other tertiary level education, followed by Southern Asia, with 71 girls for every 100 boys. No recent figure is available for Oceania, but only 64 girls were enrolled for every 100 boys in 1998.

The situation by country shows very large disparities. The gender gap in tertiary enrolment ranges from 15 to 340 girls for every 100 boys in Eritrea and Saint Lucia, respectively. The gender disparity favours girls in countries where overall enrolments are high like in developed

countries, some countries in Latin America and the Caribbean and in some Arab Gulf countries such as Qatar, Oman and Saudi Arabia. Among the most populous countries, only Brazil favours girls, with a gender gap in tertiary enrolment of 129. All other countries in this group are enrolling more boys than girls in tertiary education. With the exception of Indonesia and Mexico, where the gender gap is over 85, the remaining countries in this group are enrolling fewer than two girls for every three boys.

Overall, in most developing regions, gender disparities become progressively more marked when girls enter secondary school and later go to university. Of some 65 developing countries with full data, about half have achieved gender parity in primary education, about 20 per cent in secondary and only 8 per cent in higher education.

*Two thirds of the world's illiterates are women*

According to UNESCO estimates for 2000-2004, almost two thirds of the world's 800 million illiterates are women.<sup>1</sup> And in almost all countries where literacy is below 90 per cent, women are more likely than men to be without reading and writing skills. Eliminating illiteracy worldwide and closing the gap for women and girls is a policy priority for the international community. Literacy is a fundamental skill that empowers women to take control of their lives, engage directly with authority and access the wider world of learning (for technical details on literacy estimates, see [How the indicators are calculated](#) in the section on goal 2).

In general, progress in school enrolment over the years has resulted in higher literacy rates for the younger age groups. However, in some regions, literacy rates remain low, even in the 15- to 24-year-old age group. And where literacy rates are low, the gender gap remains a serious concern. Of the 137 million illiterate youths in the world, 85 million are women – 63 per cent of the total.<sup>2</sup>

The largest gap is in Southern Asia, where women's literacy rates are 19 percentage points lower than men's. They are 17 percentage points lower in Bangladesh and 24 points lower in Pakistan. In countries including Benin, Chad and Liberia, the difference is well over 30 points.

**Table 4. Gender disparity in youth literacy rates, 1990-2000/04**

Region	1990			2000/04		
	Literacy rate 15-24		Literacy gender parity index, ages 15-24	Literacy rate 15-24		Literacy gender parity index, ages 15-24
	Women	Men		Women	Men	
Developed regions	99.6	99.7	1.00	99.7	99.7	1.00
CIS, Europe	99.8	99.8	1.00	99.8	99.8	1.00
CIS, Asia	97.7	97.7	1.00	98.8	98.8	1.00
Developing regions	75.8	85.8	0.88	80.7	89.0	0.91
Northern Africa	55.8	76.3	0.73	72.5	84.1	0.86
Sub-Saharan Africa	59.8	74.9	0.80	69.3	79.0	0.88
Latin America/Caribbean	92.7	92.7	1.00	95.9	95.2	1.01
Eastern Asia	93.3	97.6	0.96	98.6	99.2	0.99
Southern Asia	51.0	71.1	0.72	62.8	81.6	0.77
South-Eastern Asia	93.1	95.5	0.97	95.1	96.4	0.99
Western Asia	71.5	88.2	0.81	80.3	90.7	0.89
Oceania	68.0	78.5	0.87	78.1	84.4	0.93

*Source:* United Nations Statistics Division, "World and regional trends", Millennium Indicators Database, <http://millenniumindicators.un.org> (accessed June 2005); based on data provided by UNESCO.

Although there has been some progress in the 1990s in reducing the gender gap in literacy, at the current rate, Southern Asia, Western Asia and Northern and sub-Saharan Africa will not achieve the MDG target by 2015.

## Gender equality in the labour market

Reducing gender inequality in the labour market – manifested by occupational segregation, gender wage gaps, women’s disproportionate representation in informal employment and unpaid work and higher unemployment rates – is essential to increasing women’s economic security, defeating poverty and fostering sustainable development and growth.

Globally, the presence of women in non-agricultural paid employment increased from 1990 to 2003. However, the type and quality of jobs available to women have not necessarily improved, and women continue to suffer more acutely than men from lack of decent work.

Women’s share of the labour market in non-agricultural employment remains well below 50 per cent in all developing regions. Only in the developed regions are women and men approaching parity. In the CIS, the equality in wage employment hides a deteriorating job situation for both women and men. Many have lost their jobs, and pay and benefits have been eroded.

This evidence of gender inequality is an indication that women’s access to paid employment in sectors considered more secure in terms of income and social benefits is still lower than that of men’s. Although they are engaged in many sectors of the economy – including the informal sector and unpaid subsistence work – women are not as well integrated into the monetary economy as men.

Over the period 1990-2003, there was significant progress in Oceania and Southern Asia, although in the latter the share of women in paid, non-agricultural employment remains the lowest in the world. Progress was also evident in Latin America and the Caribbean, where women’s participation in this sector is close to that of men. Western Asia and Northern Africa have experienced only minimal progress and, along with Southern Asia, are unlikely to achieve the MDG target of gender equality in the labour market.

### Gender equality indicator on labour market participation

Progress towards gender equality in the labour market is assessed on the basis of the share of women wage workers in the non-agricultural sector expressed as a percentage of total wage employment in this sector. The indicator measures the degree to which labour markets are open to women in the industry and service sectors.

**Table 5. Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector, 1990-2003**

	Share of women in non-agricultural wage employment	
Regions	1990	2003
Developed regions	43.5	46.4
Commonwealth of Independent States	49.3	50.3
Northern Africa	18.9	21.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	31.5	35.8
Latin America and the Caribbean	38.2	43.5
Eastern Asia	37.9	40.0
Southern Asia	13.4	18.0
South-Eastern Asia	36.5	38.6
Western Asia	16.6	20.2
Oceania	28.9	37.3

*Source:* United Nations Statistics Division, “World and regional trends”, Millennium Indicators Database, <http://millenniumindicators.un.org> (accessed June 2005); based on data provided by ILO.

There are significant differences among regions and countries in the share of women in non-agricultural wage employment. These reflect various sociocultural attitudes towards women and work. They also reflect differences in legislation, policies and programmes and in the support available to women and men to enable them to balance work and family responsibilities.

### *Wage disparities between women and men in the CIS and South-Eastern Europe beginning to ease*

Traditionally, gender equality was taken for granted in the CIS and South-Eastern Europe. Countries under the influence of the Soviet Union used to adopt quota systems to assure equal levels of employment, and they still enjoy relatively equal levels of employment and access to education. However, looking at gender equality only through this lens does not provide an accurate view. An indicator widely used to measure gender disparity in CIS and South-Eastern European countries is the gender pay gap.<sup>3</sup> In these countries, on average, women's wages as a percentage of men's wages decreased after 1995. Initial data for 2002 reveal that these wage disparities are diminishing.

### *The quality and conditions of work for women are often poor*

The participation of women in non-agricultural paid employment reflects the extent to which women have access to paid jobs and thus can make their economic contribution more visible. It is often assumed that access to paid employment means that workers have financial security and social benefits. Therefore, a high proportion of women in paid employment can be understood as having achieved the goal of equality of opportunity. Information on the quality, conditions and characteristics of work, however, and the family context of women and men workers, often tell a different story. Indeed, men continue to have greater opportunities than women "to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity", triggering differences between men and women in the areas of rights at work, employment, social protection and social dialogue.<sup>4</sup>

The share of women in paid employment outside agriculture is only an indication of the presence or absence of work. It does not take into account the conditions of such work in terms of remuneration, type of occupation and the existence of adequate anti-discriminatory regulations and family policies. Also, due to differences in national circumstances and survey methodologies, the data do not capture to the same extent in all countries women who work in the informal sector or as home-based workers. Moreover, this indicator does not reflect other important work that women contribute to. For instance, women are much more likely than men to work for the family without pay.

Even where women have made significant gains in paid employment, labour markets remain strongly segregated, often to the disadvantage of women. The extent and pattern of this segregation vary across countries in relation to the social, cultural and economic circumstances in each country. Occupational segregation is often accompanied by lower pay and worse working conditions in female occupations. Occupational segregation decreased significantly during the 1990s in developed countries, Latin America and the Middle East.<sup>5</sup> Women now hold proportionately more professional and managerial jobs, but the share continues to be lower than that of men.<sup>6</sup>

Women are also less likely than men to hold "core" or regular and better-remunerated positions. And they are frequently confined to peripheral, insecure and less valued jobs with low status, such as home workers and casual or part-time workers. Among the self-employed, women are much more likely than men to work as contributing family workers (without pay) and in the informal economy.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, women tend to be found in informal non-agricultural employment to a larger extent than men in most countries. This is the case particularly in Asian and African economies.<sup>8</sup>

Proportionately more women than men are unemployed, particularly young women (below 25 years old) in Latin America and the Caribbean, Southern and Western Asia and Northern Africa. In contrast, unemployment is lower for women than for men in sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Asia.<sup>9</sup>

### *The informal sector is an important source of employment for women*

Women's employment in the informal sector as a percentage of women's total non-agricultural employment is generally higher than for men. The difference is particularly evident in sub-Saharan Africa, where 84 per cent of women's non-agricultural employment is informal,

compared to 63 per cent of men's. In Latin America, the percentages are 58 and 48 for women and men, respectively. In Northern Africa and Middle Eastern countries, the pattern is reversed, with employment in the informal sector being more important for men than for women.<sup>10</sup>

Women are less likely to secure better-remunerated jobs for a variety of reasons, including discriminatory stereotyping and because they are less available for full-time work due to greater family responsibilities.

#### *Women represent the majority of the working poor*

Partly as a result of discrimination in the labour market, women represent the majority of the poor in both developed and developing countries. Out of the 550 million working poor in the world, an estimated 330 million are women, or 60 per cent.<sup>11</sup> Several factors contribute to this situation, including the undervaluation of women's work and women's intermittent career paths, due mainly to their role as caregivers in the family and their greater need to balance work and family life. In some countries, there are also legal restrictions or prohibitions against women engaging in certain types of work. Despite some progress in women's wages in the 1990s, women still earn less than men, even for similar kinds of work.<sup>12</sup>

#### *Women have a double burden: work and home*

In most societies, women are primarily responsible for the care of family members. They therefore face greater constraints than men in the amount of time and effort they can put into paid employment. In developing countries, there is still considerable reliance on the extended family to care for younger children, the sick and the elderly. Moreover, there are few public or private services to respond to the needs of parents working outside the home and limited public action or legislation that seeks to harmonize work and family duties, even in areas where the impact of HIV/AIDS has dramatically increased the burden of care on poor working women. There is still little recognition of the contribution of household work to national economies and therefore little change in economic and social policies regarding caregivers.

In some countries and sectors, working practices have emerged to assist women in balancing work and family commitments. The division of labour within households is closely related to inequalities in the labour market, and there is a need for a more equitable distribution of women's and men's sharing of childcare and domestic and community responsibilities.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Rights for women workers are often overlooked or denied*

Most member states of the International Labour Organization have ratified the ILO Labour Standards concerning equal rights – Convention No. 100 on Equal Remuneration (1951) and Convention No. 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) (1958) – and have enacted national legislation in line with the principles of these conventions. However, in many countries, much remains to be done in terms of their enforcement and implementation. Very few countries have ratified<sup>14</sup> Convention No. 156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities (1981), demonstrating a lack of preparedness or capacity to ensure the equal rights of such workers. Similarly, ILO conventions related to maternity protection<sup>15</sup> are poorly ratified.

The employment situation of women is also affected by the rights they enjoy or are denied by law – such as the right to own property and to access credit and, in some countries, even the right to hold an occupation. Women are often at a disadvantage in respect to fundamental workers' rights, such as equality, freedom of association and representation, and the abolition of forced labour or the elimination of child labour.

In poor countries in particular, women lag behind men with regard to access to representation in workers' organizations, especially in leadership positions. Increasingly, women migrate to precarious and risky work situations where they are largely engaged in low-skilled occupations such as domestic work and entertainment, or worse, are trafficked into the commercial sex industry.<sup>16</sup>

## Gender equality in national parliaments

The number of women in national parliaments continues to increase, but no country in the world has yet reached gender parity. By 1 January 2005, only 17 countries had met the target set by the UN Economic and Social Council in 1990 of having 30 per cent or more women in national legislative seats. By 1 January 2005, the proportion of seats held by women in single or lower houses of parliament was 15.9 per cent globally, up from 13.5 per cent in 2000. Across both upper and lower/single houses, the figure reached 15.7 per cent at the beginning of 2005. The number of countries where women are completely absent from the legislature has declined over the past ten years from 12 countries to 9. And as of 1 January 2005, affirmative action measures, such as reserving seats for women or party quotas, were being implemented by 81 countries across all regions.

### Gender equality indicator on political participation

Women's participation in political decision-making is monitored by the percentage of seats held by women in unicameral parliaments or in the lower houses.

A number of factors continue to present challenges to women's parliamentary representation. The type of electoral system in place in a country, the role and discipline of political parties, women's social and economic status, sociocultural traditions and beliefs about women's place in the family and society, and women's double burden of work and family responsibilities can all have an impact on the number – and effectiveness – of women candidates in the electoral process.

**Table 6. Percentage of parliamentary seats held by women (single or lower house only)<sup>1/</sup> 1990-2005**

Regions	1990	1997	2005
World	12.4	11.4	15.9
Developed regions	15.4	15.6	20.9
Commonwealth of Independent States	-	6.2	10.5
Commonwealth of Independent States, Asia	-	7.0	11.5
Commonwealth of Independent States, Europe	-	5.4	10.5
Developing regions	10.4	10.1	14.3
Northern Africa	2.6	1.8	8.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	7.2	9.0	14.2
Latin America and the Caribbean	11.9	12.4	19.0
Eastern Asia	20.2	19.3	19.4
Southern Asia	5.7	5.9	8.3
South-Eastern Asia	10.4	10.8	15.5
Western Asia	4.6	3.0	5.0
Oceania	1.2	1.6	3.0
Least developed countries	7.3	7.3	12.7
Landlocked developing countries	14.0	6.6	13.2
Small island developing states	14.4	11.0	17.3

<sup>1/</sup> Data refer to 1 January of each year.

Source: United Nations Statistics Division, "World and regional trends", Millennium Indicators Database, <http://millenniumindicators.un.org> (accessed June 2005) based on data provided by the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Since 1990, most regions have seen substantial increases in the proportion of women in parliament. The largest relative increases have been in Northern Africa – where the percentage

of women in parliaments tripled since 1990 – followed by Latin America and the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa. There was significant progress also in the developed regions and in Southern and South-Eastern Asia. The lowest representation of women in national parliaments continues to be in Oceania, where women’s share has consistently been the lowest of all regions, and in Western Asia, where women’s presence in parliament remains on average 5 per cent.

In moving towards multiparty democracies, countries in the CIS saw a significant decrease in the number of women in the political arena in the early 1990s. Under the Soviet system, where women’s political participation was guaranteed, women’s representation was frequently over 30 per cent. Today, the regional average is only 10.5 per cent. Since 1997, women’s presence in the parliaments of CIS countries in both Europe and Asia has begun to increase.

Nordic countries have experienced a sustained and exceptionally high level of women’s participation in the political arena, with the percentage of women in parliament well above 30 per cent.

*Recent positive developments are enhancing women’s political participation*

In the process of democratization, many post-conflict countries recognized the importance of including women in reconstruction processes and in ensuring women’s participation in new democratic institutions. The national constitutions of Rwanda and Burundi, for example, now include provisions to reserve seats for women. In 2003, elections in Rwanda saw the greatest proportion of women elected to any parliament in history. These elections were the first since the internal conflict of 1994. In the aftermath of this conflict, as in other countries emerging from a crisis situation, women became integral to the reconstruction and democratization process. Today, with 48.8 per cent of women, the Rwandan parliament has come the closest to reaching an equal number of men and women.

In South Africa and Mozambique, the introduction of quota mechanisms by political parties meant that, in 2004, post-conflict and post-crisis countries ranked among the highest in the world in terms of women’s representation (in Eritrea, Mozambique and South Africa women comprise between 22 per cent to 35 per cent of the legislature).

The increase in women’s parliamentary representation in Latin America and the Caribbean is also attributable to the introduction of affirmative action measures. Various quotas for women’s political participation exist in 17 countries in this region. In a number of them, including Argentina, the Bahamas, Costa Rica, Grenada, Mexico and Nicaragua, women represent over 20 per cent of the legislature.

Driven mostly by political elites, similar efforts have also been made in the Arab world. In Morocco, the electoral law was amended prior to the 2002 parliamentary elections to reserve 30 seats for women. Thirty-five women were subsequently elected. In Tunisia, the President’s party earmarked 25 per cent of positions on its electoral list for women. Women won 22.7 per cent of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies in 2004, putting Tunisia at the top of the regional ranking for women in Arab parliaments.

**Chart 3. Countries that have reached 30 per cent representation by women in parliament, as of 1 January 2005**

	Percentage of seats held by women	Number of seats held by women	Total number of seats
Rwanda	48.8	39	80
Sweden	45.3	158	349
Norway	38.2	63	165
Denmark	38.0	68	179
Finland	37.5	75	200
Netherlands	36.7	55	150
Cuba	36.0	219	609
Spain	36.0	126	350
Costa Rica	35.1	20	57
Mozambique	34.8	87	250
Belgium	34.7	52	150
Austria	33.9	62	183
Argentina	33.7	86	255
Germany	32.8	197	601
South Africa	32.8	131	400
Guyana	30.8	20	65
Iceland	30.2	19	63

*Source:* United Nations Statistics Division, “World and regional trends”, Millennium Indicators Database, <http://millenniumindicators.un.org> (accessed June 2005); based on data provided by the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Following elections in 2003, women also improved their parliamentary representation in Belgium, Djibouti, Jordan, Mexico and Paraguay. All of these countries have introduced quota legislation in recent years. In countries where women had previously comprised at least 10 per cent of their legislatures, smaller gains were made, namely in Finland (with an increase of 0.5 percentage points), Estonia (+1 percentage point), Switzerland (+2.5), the Netherlands (+2.7) and Israel (+3.3).

In contrast, women continued to be absent from the parliaments of the Federated States of Micronesia, Kuwait and Nauru.

A significant presence of women in parliament does not, in itself, guarantee that women have achieved equality in the political sphere. Nor does it guarantee that greater attention will be given to gender issues or translated into policies and action on gender equality. The impact women parliamentarians can actually make once in office and the impact of men parliamentarians in addressing gender issues should also be considered. The extent to which women parliamentarians are familiar with parliamentary rules and procedures, how they effectively utilize them and are able to influence and change them when necessary all contribute to the ability of women to make a difference once elected. Also, the extent to which women are appointed to positions of power within the parliament, such as presiding officers, leaders of parliamentary parties, and chairs of committees (not only in areas such as health and the family) needs to be considered.

Democracy is premised on a genuine partnership between men and women. Increasing the participation of women in the political life of a nation constitutes an important step towards democratization. Among other things, women's participation ensures diversity in contributions to policy-making and can offer new perspectives and development priorities. Without the participation of women, a parliament cannot be considered representative of the population it is intended to serve.

## **An agenda for change**

### *Achieving gender parity in education and employment*

At current rates, the target of eliminating gender disparity in educational enrolment by 2015 will not be met in many regions. The slow pace of progress is a particular concern in Southern and Western Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa.

Policies and programmes to advance action for women and girls are needed in most regions. A three-step rights agenda, outlined in the Gender and Education for All Report, 2003,<sup>17</sup> provides a framework for understanding the multiple dimensions of inequality, both inside and outside the confines of school. The first relates to constraints within the family and society that affect girls' access to education. The second relates to how school systems take (or fail to take) the specific needs of girls into account in their curricula, teaching methods and learning environment. The third takes up the issue of how girls perform in school and the extent to which achievement translates into equal opportunities in social and economic spheres. Gender inequalities can only be dealt with by taking all three dimensions into account.

Progress for women in the area of work is also slow. To promote equal employment opportunities for women, gender-sensitive policies and programmes must be developed and implemented. Supporting women's entrepreneurship through targeted micro-credit schemes, for instance, is a key strategy for the economic empowerment of women and their families.

The burden of care and family responsibilities is a constraint to women's employment promotion and economic empowerment. Public policies that aim to free women from the burden of care and other household tasks may help them play a stronger role in paid work. For instance, investments to increase women's access to water and fuel and improved sanitation free them from unpaid work and enable them to engage in other productive activities.

Balancing paid and care-giving work is a critical issue, especially in countries where AIDS is on the rise. Countries will need to take special measures to support those who are infected and/or affected by HIV and AIDS by recognizing the economic and social value of unpaid care work in national legislation, policies and programmes.

An important component of countries' efforts to eliminate sex-based discrimination in employment is their ratification and implementation of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.<sup>18</sup> Workers' and employers' organizations need to make continued efforts to increase women's representation at all levels, not only in their organizations, but also in leadership positions and at international and regional meetings.

### *Achieving gender parity in political representation*

Women's representation in politics continues to lag. Despite some progress, it is clear that much more needs to be done. In most of the 17 countries where the 30 per cent target in women's political representation has been reached,<sup>19</sup> some kind of affirmative action measures have been instituted.

These can take the form of reserved seats in parliament, electoral candidate quotas endorsed by political parties, or other affirmative action measures.

In addition to the relatively low numbers of women in national parliaments worldwide (16 per cent), the number of women presiding over parliamentary chambers is on the decline. By the end of 2004, only 20 women (or 8 per cent) held such positions.

Ultimately, parliaments themselves need to become more gender-sensitive so as to ensure women's equal political participation with men and the introduction of gender-sensitive policies. A parliament's structure and rules, and the attitude of its members, can all have an impact on the capacity of women parliamentarians to contribute and participate fully.

In several parliaments, changes and mechanisms have been introduced to create a work environment respectful of gender equality. In the United Kingdom, for example, "family friendly" sitting hours were introduced in 2000, allowing members to return earlier to their constituencies and families. In addition to a change in sitting hours, women in South Africa were able to institute a crèche in the parliamentary building. In several countries, including India and Uganda, a parliamentary committee dedicated to women has been established, often with mandates to examine the impact of all legislation on gender.

Sensitizing the political system requires a coordinated effort at various levels, by governments, parliaments, political parties, civil society, international organizations and academia. Most importantly, men and women must work together to create a more enabling environment in parliament.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO website: [http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=35964&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=35964&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Defined as the average of all women's wages as a proportion of the average of all men's wages.

<sup>4</sup> *Report of the Director General: Decent work*, International Labour Conference, 87<sup>th</sup> Session, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Anker, Richard, et al., *Gender based occupational segregation in the 1990s*, ILO Working Paper Declaration/WP/16/2003, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> ILO, *Breaking through the glass ceiling: women in management – Updated 2004* (Geneva, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> *Global Report on the Follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*, (ILO, Geneva, 2003).

- <sup>8</sup> *Key Indicators of Labour Market (KILM) 2001-2002 edition* (ILO, Geneva, 2002).
- <sup>9</sup> ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Women*, March 2004, p. 2.
- <sup>10</sup> International Labour Organization, *Global employment trends*, p.19 (Geneva, 2003).
- <sup>11</sup> ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Women*, March 2004, p. 2.
- <sup>12</sup> *Key Indicators of Labour Market (KILM) 2001-2002 edition* (ILO, Geneva, 2002).
- <sup>13</sup> Anker, Richard, et al., *Measuring Decent Work with Statistical Indicators*, Integration Working Paper No. 2 (ILO, Geneva, 2002) p. 38.
- <sup>14</sup> Based on 11 developing countries out of a total of 32 countries.
- <sup>15</sup> A new Convention on Maternity Protection (No. 183) adopted in 2000 has so far been ratified by four countries.
- <sup>16</sup> ILO, *An Information Guide - Preventing Discrimination, Exploitation and Abuse of Women Migrant Workers*.
- <sup>17</sup> UNESCO, *Gender and Education for All. The Leap to Equality*, 2003.
- <sup>18</sup> *Global Report on the Follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*, (ILO, Geneva, 2003).
- <sup>19</sup> Namely Rwanda, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Belgium, Costa Rica, Austria, Germany, Argentina, Iceland and Mozambique.

## How the indicators are calculated

### Ratios of girls to boys enrolled at primary, secondary and tertiary levels

Due to changes in the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), there is a break in the data series before and after 1997. The effect on data for primary education is minimal, given that there have not been substantial changes in the classification of primary level. However, changes affected secondary and tertiary levels of education (ISCED levels 3 and above) more significantly, making comparisons of data before and after 1997 more difficult.

The indicator on gender equality in enrolment is calculated as the ratio of the female gross enrolment ratio (GER) to the male gross enrolment ratio at primary, secondary and tertiary education levels. This indicator takes into account the underlying population structure by sex, thus avoiding the over- or under-estimation in the enrolment ratio due to the overall sex composition of the population in the age group considered. The enrolment by level of education and sex needs to be weighted by the appropriate age/sex group population.

The GER is calculated as total enrolment in a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the eligible official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education in a given school year.

### Youth literacy gender parity index

The youth literacy gender parity index is calculated as the ratio of female to male youth literacy rates for the age group 15 to 24. The youth literacy rate reflects the impact of a country's basic education system and the ability of young adults to read, write and communicate. It is often used as a proxy measure of social progress and economic achievement. The literacy rate discussed and calculated for this analysis is simply the complement of the illiteracy rate. It does not measure the quality and adequacy of the level of literacy needed for individuals to function in a society. (For more details on this indicator, see "How the indicators are calculated" in the section on goal 2.)

### **Women's share in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector**

Women's share in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector is expressed as the percentage of total wage employment in the sector. The non-agricultural sector includes "industry" and "services". Following the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) of All Economic Activities, industry comprises mining and quarrying (including oil production), manufacturing, electricity, gas and water supply, and construction. Services comprises wholesale and retail trade, hotels and restaurants, transport, storage and communications, financial intermediation, real estate, renting and business activities, public administration and defence, social security, education, health and social work, other community, social and personal service activities, and activities of private households as employers. Employment refers to people above a certain age who worked, or held a job, during a reference period. Employment data include both full-time and part-time workers whose remuneration is determined on the basis of hours worked or number of items produced and is independent of profits or expectation of profits.

### **Women's representation in national parliament**

Data on the total number of parliamentary seats and the number occupied by women and men are reported to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which regularly compiles international data series and global and regional aggregates. The indicator is obtained by dividing the number of parliamentary seats occupied by women by the total number of seats occupied. National parliaments consist of one or two chambers. For international comparisons, only the single or lower house is considered in calculating the indicator.

Informal consultations with the IPU and other partner agencies have been initiated on possible alternatives for the regional aggregation methodology to better reflect actual trends.