WHERE ARE THE WOMEN? GENDER EQUALITY IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN AFRICA

Gender equality in public administration has improved in recent years, but there is still a long way to go. Women's participation in the civil service approaches parity with 46 percent on average across 139 countries and territories.[1] Yet, significant variation across countries and regions means that only one-third (33 percent) of countries have reached this goal. At decision-making levels of the civil service, women make up only 31 percent of top leadership positions on average. Women are also missing from COVID-19 policy decision-making spaces. Even though women make up 58 percent of employees in health ministries worldwide,[2] they average just 24 percent of COVID-19 task force positions and make up only 18 percent of task force leadership.[3]

This brief provides an overview on women's participation and leadership in public administration, and the gendered dimensions of the COVID-19 policy response in sub-Saharan Africa. Women across Africa are under-represented across all levels of public administration, but particularly at decision-making levels, consistent with global patterns.

Gender equality in public administration in Africa[4]

FIGURE 1
Availability of gender-disaggregated data on public administration employment between 1970 and 2020
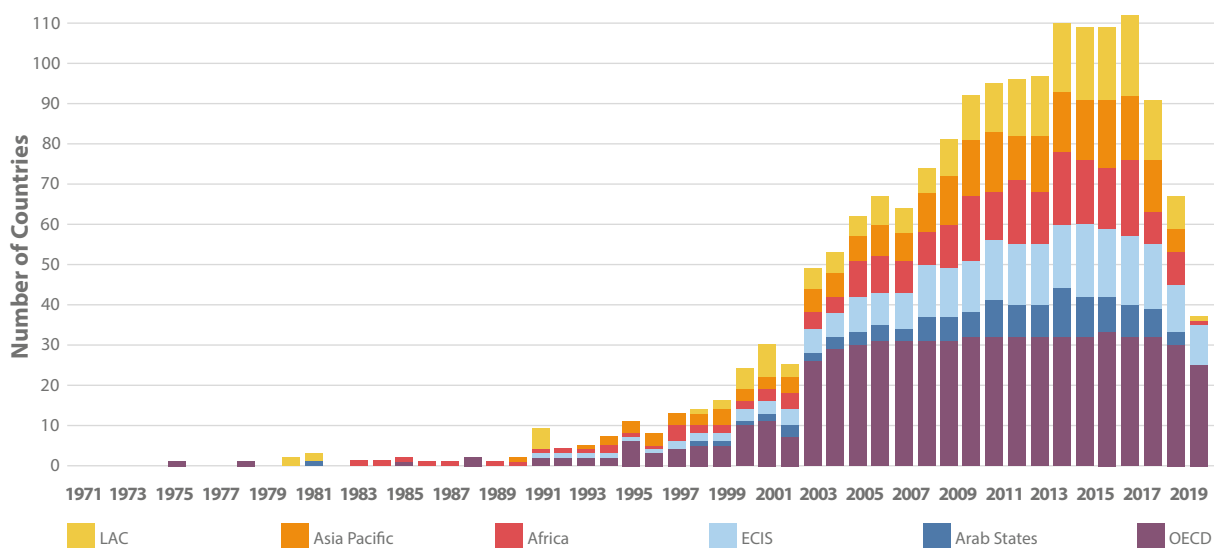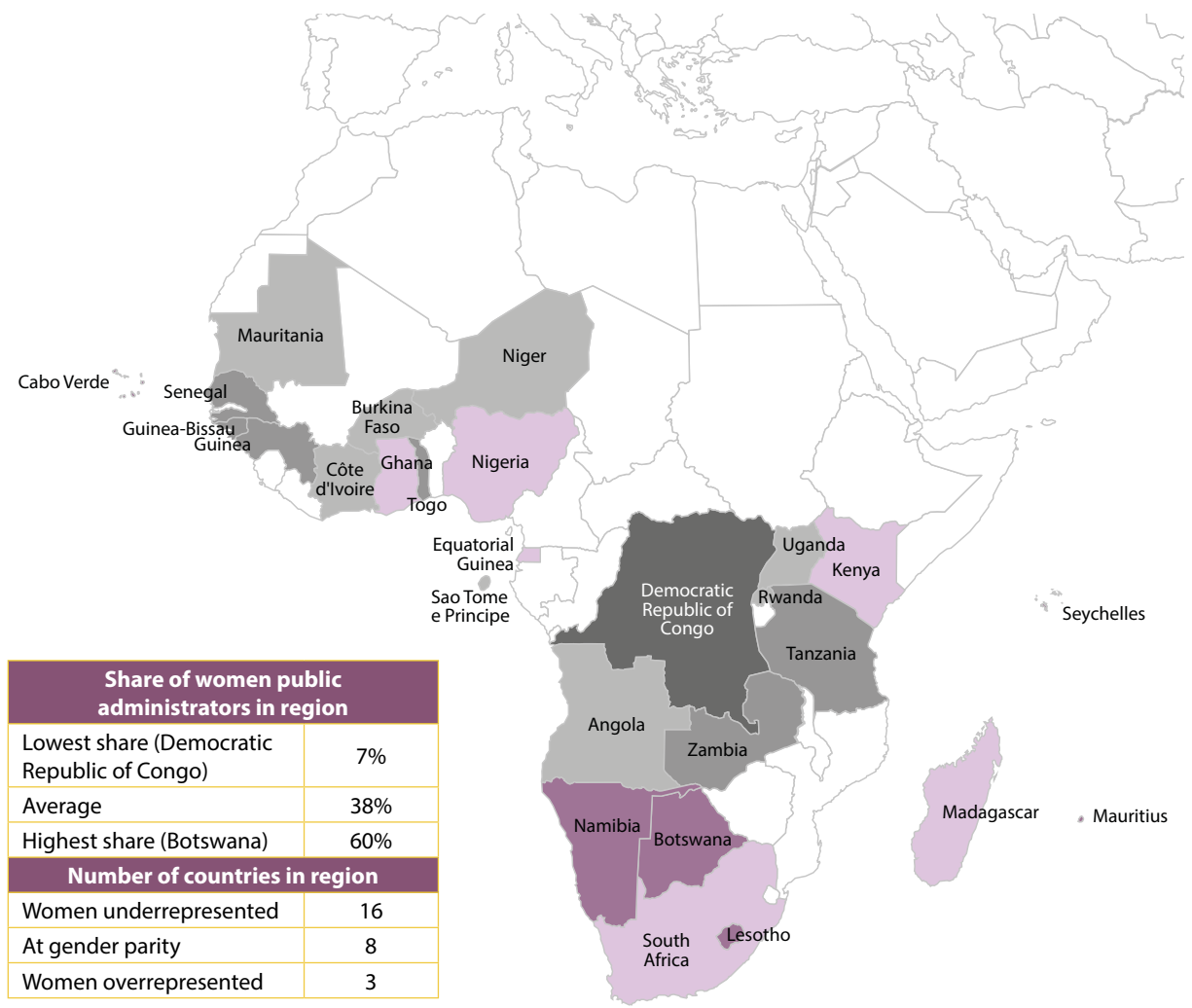

Source: Gender Parity in Civil Service (Gen-PaCS) dataset, December 2020.

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1   Hughes, Melanie M., Müge Kökten Finkel, and Brianna Howell. 2021. "Gender Parity in Civil Service (Gen-PaCS) Dataset."
2   Ibid.
3   UNDP-UN Women-UPITT. 2021. "COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker Task Force Dataset." Living database, version 2 (November 11, 2021). Accessible at https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/.
4   Hughes, Melanie M., Müge Kökten Finkel, and Brianna Howell. 2021. "Gender Parity in Civil Service (Gen-PaCS) Dataset."

The availability of gender-disaggregated data has improved over time in every region of the world, including in sub-Saharan Africa. In this region, there are 40 countries or territories with gender-disaggregated data available on at least one dimension of public administration (see appendix). Thirty-eight countries have data available on overall employment, 21 on decision-making, and 17 have ministry-level data. Intersectional data remains a large gap in the region: data on age is available for only five countries, race/ethnicity in seven countries, and disability in four countries.

FIGURE 2
Percentage of women's participation across all levels of public administration

Share of women public administrators in region	
Lowest share (Democratic Republic of Congo)	7%
Average	38%
Highest share (Botswana)	60%
Number of countries in region	
Women underrepresented	16
At gender parity	8
Women overrepresented	3

Percentage of Women in Public Administration

■ < 10%   ■ 10–29%   ■ 30–44%   ■ 45–54% (Gender Parity)   ■ 55–69%   ■ 70%+

Note: *The map indicates the overall share of women in public administration for countries in the region using the most recent year of data available. Data prior to 2015 are excluded. The depiction and use of boundaries, geographic names and related data shown on the map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations, including UNDP, or UN Member States.*
Source: *Gender Parity in Civil Service (Gen-PaCS) dataset, December 2020.*
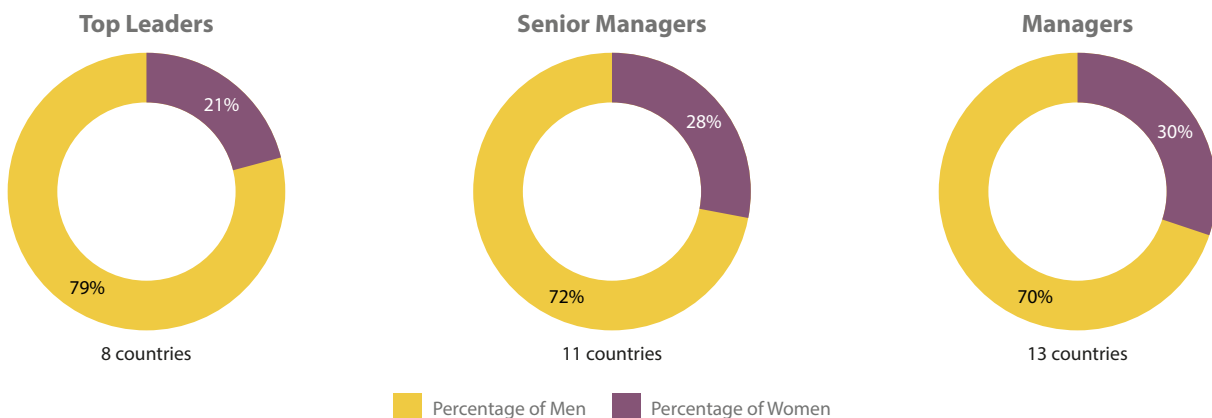
Women's participation in public administration

Of the 27 countries in sub-Saharan Africa with recent available data,[5] women account for 38 percent of civil servants in the region at large – far below the threshold of gender parity.[6] At the country level, eight countries reach gender parity: Cabo Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Nigeria, Seychelles, and South Africa. Women are overrepresented in three countries where they account for nearly 60 percent of public administrators: Botswana, Lesotho, and Namibia. In Botswana and Namibia, where gender-disaggregated public administration data has been available for several years since 2015, women have consistently accounted for more than 50 percent of civil service workers. On the opposite end of the spectrum, there are 16 countries where women are underrepresented, including in Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mauritania, where they make up only 7 and 14 percent of public administrators, respectively.

Women in public administration decision-making positions

FIGURE 3
Share of women among public administration decision-making positions

Top Leaders	Senior Managers	Managers
21% / 79%	28% / 72%	30% / 70%
8 countries	11 countries	13 countries

Percentage of Men   Percentage of Women

Note: *Data is displayed for most recent year available. Data prior to 2015 is excluded.*
Source: *Gender Parity in Civil Service (Gen-PaCS) dataset, December 2020.*

Women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making in public administration in sub-Saharan Africa. The gender disparity is most noticeable at the highest levels of decision-making. In these top leadership positions, women make up only 21 percent of public administrators across eight countries with available data. Women fare slightly better at the next highest decision-making level of senior managers. Across the 11 countries with available data, women make up 28 percent of senior management positions in public administration. Women are best represented in Lesotho, accounting for 38 percent of civil servants at these top two decision-making levels. At the lowest level of decision-making monitored, managers within the civil service, women make up 30 percent of members across 13 countries with available data. At this managerial level, women reach parity in Lesotho (53 percent) and Namibia (54 percent). Women remain underrepresented among managers in the remaining 11 countries.

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5   Countries with data from prior to 2015 were excluded from this analysis. Data points are calculated using the most recent year of data available.
6   Parity is defined as an equal number of men and women, however small deviations from 50 percent women and men are expected, in some cases simply because of an odd number of positions. This brief therefore considers parity to have been reached once there are 45 percent women, and women's overrepresentation begins at 55 percent.

COVID-19 leadership and policy response in Africa[7]

Women's representation on national COVID-19 task forces[8]

COVID-19 task forces are any executive branch institution created by the national government in response to the pandemic. There are 67 COVID-19 task forces across 36 countries/territories in sub-Saharan Africa, including 36 task forces with data on membership and 65 task forces with leadership data. Women average just 20 percent of COVID-19 task force members in sub-Saharan Africa. Lesotho and South Africa are the only two countries, where women make up the majority of task force members, while Ethiopia is the only country with a task force that has achieved gender parity. There are three task forces in the region that have no women members at all: Benin, Botswana, and Burundi. For COVID-19 task force leadership, only 10 out of 65 task forces are led by women, including those in Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, South Africa, Togo, and Zimbabwe.

Gender sensitive COVID-19 policy response[9]

The UNDP/UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker identifies policy measures taken by governments in response to COVID-19 and analyzes them with a gender lens. In sub-Saharan Africa, 686 measures have been identified from 48 different countries/territories. Of these, 214 (31 percent) have been identified as gender sensitive, including 89 measures to address gender-based violence, 115 measures tackling women's economic security, and only 10 measures designed to address unpaid care work. Measures that strengthen existing services, such as hotlines, shelters or judicial response, account for nearly 65 percent of all measures tackling gender-based violence in the region. The box below details the urgency of gender-based violence policies within Kenya during the pandemic.

COVID-19 and government response to gender-based violence in Kenya[10]

Kenya's National Bureau of Statistics reported that 24 percent of Kenyans have witnessed or heard of cases of domestic violence in their communities since COVID-19 containment measures began in February 2020.[11] Around the same time, the Ministry of Health and Population Council reported that 39 percent of women and 32 percent of men experienced tension in their homes. These conditions have contributed to an exponential increase in the number of people seeking help through the National Helpline for Survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence ("1195"). Between February and June 2020, the number of calls jumped by nearly 1,200 percent, and remained high in subsequent months.[12,13] All callers received psychosocial first aid and referral services, but the enormous caseloads challenged remaining resources. Furthermore, gender-based violence (GBV) cases were backlogged in the judicial system due to COVID-19 restrictions. The Kenyan Government has taken several measures to address GBV, including allowing remote access to courts and the development of an e-filing system to allow litigants to file and track the progress of cases online. The Government also integrated GBV into its overall COVID-19 response plan, which included several measures to support survivors, such as designating safe accommodation and recovery spaces, creating "alert chains" to reach survivors or those under threat of harm, and helping to localize outreach strategies for survivors.[14]

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7   For the most up-to-date information on COVID-19 task forces and policy responses, visit https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/.

8   UNDP-UN Women-UPITT. 2021. "COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker Task Force Dataset." Living database, version 2 (November 11, 2021). Accessible at https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/.

9   UNDP-UN Women. 2021. "COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker Policy Measures Dataset." Living database, version 3 (November 11, 2021). Accessible at https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/.

10   Finkel, Müge Kökten, Melanie M. Hughes, and Joanna Hill. 2021. Gender Equality in Public Administration. New York, NY: UNDP and University of Pittsburgh. https://www.undp.org/publications/global-report-gender-equality-public-administration.

11   UN OCHA. 2020. "Kenya, Sector Status: Protection (Gender-Based Violence)." https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/kenya/card/2rC8ktJetx.

12   Ibid.

13   UN News. 2020. "We Want Justice for These Girls': The Kenyan Helpline for Victims of Gender Violence." https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/10/1075522.

14   UNDP-UN Women. 2021. "COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker Policy Measures Dataset." Living database, version 3 (November 11, 2021). Accessible at https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/.

Appendix

Women's participation in public administration in Africa[15, 16]

Country or territory	Percentage of women in public administration overall	Decision–making positions		
		Top leaders (percent)	Senior managers (percent)	Managers (percent)
Angola	42 (2018)	30 (2014)	31 (2013)	21 (2016)
Benin	–	26 (2014)	–	–
Botswana	60 (2019)	–	–	–
Burkina Faso	33 (2017)	28 (2016)	–	–
Burundi	50 (2008)	–	–	–
Cabo Verde	47 (2019)	–	34 (2015)	21 (2015)
Chad	14 (2002)	–	–	–
Congo, Republic of	33 (2003)	–	–	–
Côte d'Ivoire	31 (2015)	15 (2015)	16 (2015)	21 (2015)
Democratic Republic of the Congo	7 (2017)	12 (2015)	–	–
Equatorial Guinea	46 (2015)	–	–	–
Ethiopia	29 (2013)	–	–	–
Gabon	37 (2009)	–	–	–
Gambia	32 (2002)	–	–	–
Ghana	45 (2017)	–	–	–
Guinea	26 (2018)	11 (2017)	23 (2017)	19 (2017)
Guinea-Bissau	25 (2019)	–	19 (2017)	–
Kenya	46 (2019)	29 (2017)	29 (2019)	28 (2017)
Lesotho	59 (2017)	38 (2017)	38 (2017)	53 (2017)
Liberia	29 (2010)	–	–	–
Madagascar	45 (2017)	–	–	–
Malawi	–	25 (2014)	24 (2014)	–
Mali	28 (2010)	–	–	–
Mauritania	14 (2017)	20 (2017)	20 (2017)	30 (2017)
Mauritius	29 (2019)	–	29 (2016)	41 (2016)
Mozambique	13 (2005)	–	–	–
Namibia	58 (2017)	17 (2017)	37 (2017)	54 (2017)
Niger	36 (2016)	–	–	25 (2016)
Nigeria	54 (2016)	–	27 (2017)	34 (2017)
Rwanda	34 (2019)	–	–	–
Sao Tome and Principe	38 (2020)	–	30 (2020)	–
Senegal	25 (2017)	–	–	16 (2017)

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15 This table includes the most recent year of overall and decision-making public administration data available in Gen-PACS. Countries with data from before 2015 are excluded from the regional analyses in this brief. For 2 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, gender-disaggregated statistics on public administration are available but do not include figures for women's participation in public administration overall or at decision-making levels (Cameroon, Eswatini).

16 Table displays data for most recent year available.

Country or territory	Percentage of women in public administration overall	Decision–making positions		
		Top leaders (percent)	Senior managers (percent)	Managers (percent)
Seychelles	54 (2018)	–	–	–
Sierra Leone	17 (2014)	–	–	–
South Africa	49 (2019)	–	–	–
Tanzania, United Republic of	26 (2016)	31 (2014)	28 (2014)	–
Togo	18 (2016)	–	–	–
Uganda	37 (2017)	–	–	24 (2017)
Zambia	25 (2018)	–	27 (2014)	–
Zimbabwe	26 (2014)	27 (2014)	13 (2014)	–

Acknowledgments