



PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2025

*March forward,
accelerate action for
gender equality*

13 MARCH 2025

**PARLIAMENTARY
RESEARCH UNIT (PRU)**

WWW.PARLIAMENT.GOV.ZA



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2025 *March forward, accelerate action for gender equality*

International Women's Day is celebrated annually on 08 March. While it has existed in various formats since the early 1900s it was marked for the first time by the United Nations in 1975. 2025 thus marks 50 years since International Women's Day was first celebrated globally.

While international and domestic frameworks for the advancement of gender equality and women's rights exist and women's representation and spaces for their participation increase, gender equality is still not a tangible reality.¹

*"The world today is more equal for women and girls than ever before — but progress is still too slow, too fragile, and too uneven. Every 10 minutes, a woman is murdered by someone in her own family. Women's representation in the labour force has remained unchanged for decades. Women and girls contribute the least to climate change and yet suffer the worst consequences. And at this pace, a girl born today will be 40 years old before women hold as many seats in parliament as men."*²

The 2024 Global Gender Gap Index indicates that based on current data, it will take 134 years to reach full parity – roughly five generations beyond the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target³ of achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. When reviewing progress on SDG 5, the 2024 Sustainable Development Report highlights the following⁴:

- **THE WORLD IS OFF TRACK TO ACHIEVE SDG 5 BY 2030**
- The **dismantling of discriminatory laws is encouraging but gaps persist**: data from 120 countries show that from 2019 to 2023, a total of 56 positive legal reforms focused on removing discriminatory laws and establishing legal frameworks to advance gender equality were initiated, while 22 reforms centred on equal rights to employment and economic benefits and 18 on stopping violence against women were also developed.
- From legislatures to corporate boards, **women have made insufficient gains in leadership**: parity in women's participation in public life remains elusive, and in management positions, at current rates, parity will require another 176 years. Women's political participation remains constrained with only 27.3%

¹ Author: C. Levendale

² <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/timeline/never-backing-down-women-march-forward-for-equal-rights>

³ World Economic Forum, 2024, Global Gender Gap 2024

⁴ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf>

representation in parliaments across the globe. Only 61 women preside over one of the Houses of the 187 Parliaments, 81 of which are bicameral. Women therefore occupy only 22.5% of the total filled posts of Presiding Officers of Parliament or of one of its Houses.⁵ Men occupy a total of 208 presiding officer positions across the 187 Houses of Parliaments.

- **Heavy burdens of unpaid domestic and care work** trap women in poverty and inequality - on average, each day, women spend 2.5 times more hours on unpaid domestic and care work than men.
- Overall, 24.3 million more females live in **extreme poverty** compared to males. By 2030, a projected 8.1 per cent of females (compared to 7.6 per cent of males) will linger in extreme poverty, missing the SDG target. Ending extreme poverty for women and girls will take an additional 137 years if this trend continues.
- Only 56% of women aged 15-49 who are married, or in-union can make **decisions about their sexual and reproductive health and rights**, with significant disparities across countries and regions.
- **Combating violence, harassment, and the abuse of women and girls in all forms** and in all spheres of life, including online, will determine the achievement of gender equality: globally, 1 in every 8 women and girls aged 15-49 was subjected to sexual and/or physical violence by an intimate partner in the previous year. Globally, violence against women and girls persists at alarming rates. Across their lifetime, around or 1 in 3 women are subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence by a non-partner.⁶

The World Bank's 2024 Women, Business and the Law report notes that women also face significant obstacles in a variety of other areas⁷:

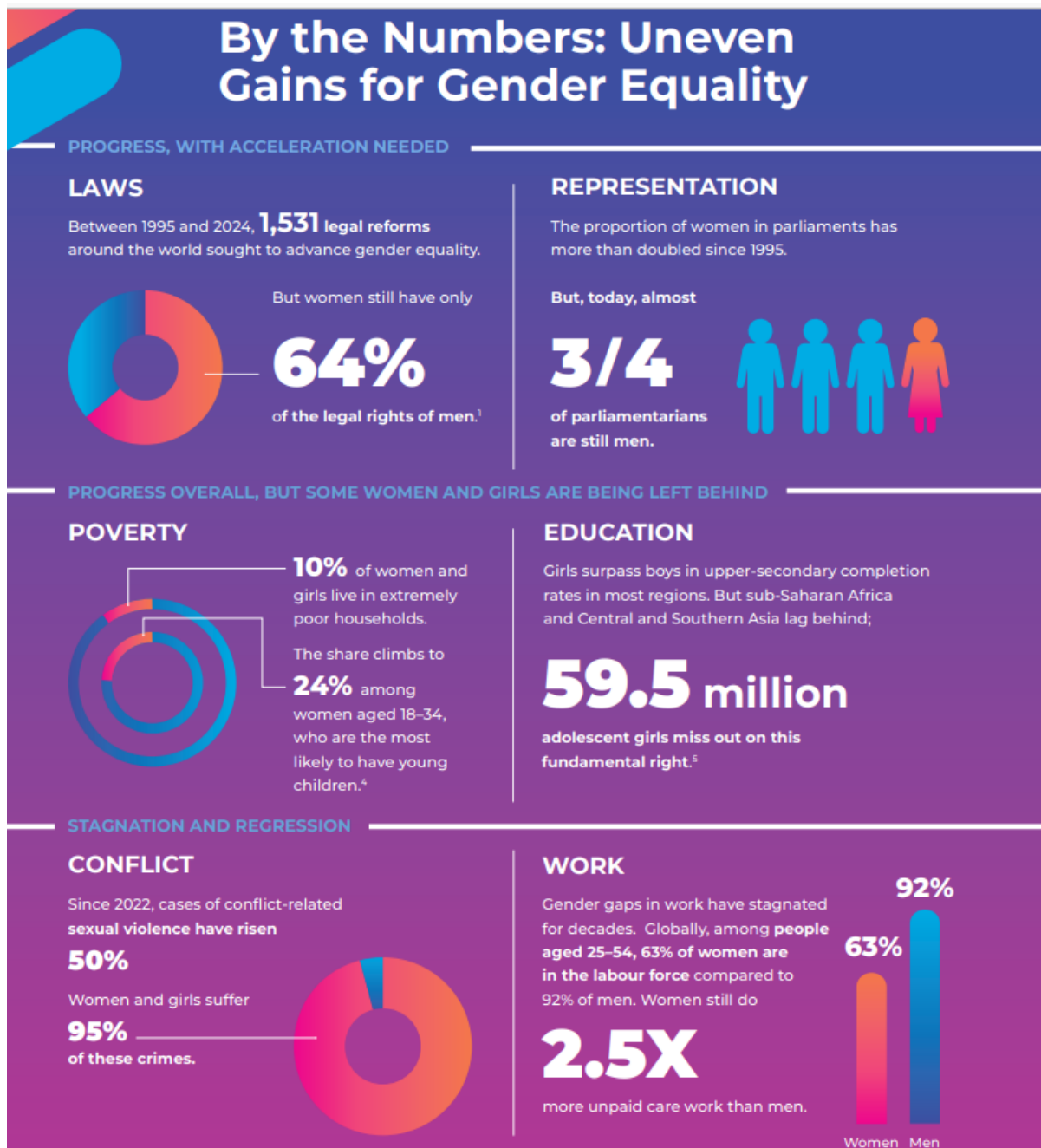
- **Entrepreneurship:** Globally, only 44 percent of the legal provisions that support the entrepreneurship of women are in place and women hold just one out of every five corporate board positions.
- **Pay:** Women earn just 77 cents for every dollar paid to men; 92 economies lack provisions mandating equal pay for work of equal value.
- **Nationality rights:** In 28 economies, a woman cannot pass her nationality to children in the same way as a man, while in 50 economies, a woman does not enjoy an equal right to confer citizenship on her foreign spouse. Such discriminatory provisions in nationality laws harm a woman's economic opportunities, limiting her inheritance and property rights and employment opportunities.
- **Retirement:** in 62 economies, the age at which men and women can retire is not the same, with women retiring earlier than men. In 81 economies, a woman's pension benefits do not account for periods of work absences related to childcare.

⁵ <https://data.ipu.org/women-speakers/>

⁶ [Women's rights in review 30 years after Beijing | Publications | UN Women – Headquarters](#)

⁷ Women, Business and the Law 2024, <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/wbl>

United Nations Women: Women's rights in review 30 years after Beijing



From the above progress highlights it is evident that much needs to be done to advance gender equality globally, as well as in South Africa.

Statistics South Africa notes that “women in SA continue to shoulder a disproportionate burden of unemployment, underemployment, and lower workforce participation compared to men. This is partly because women are more likely to take on household duties, child-rearing, and other responsibilities that limit their opportunities in the labour market... the trends in labour force participation and absorption rates for men and women from 2014 to 2024 indicate that fewer women have been participating in the labour market as compared to men.”⁸

⁸ Statistics South Africa, 2024, South African Women Struggle with Unemployment and Workforce Inequality

The latest Quarterly Labour Force Survey finds that 34.5% of young females aged 15-24 years were not in employment, education or training (NEET) in Quarter 4 of 2024, while Black African women continue to be the most vulnerable with an unemployment rate of 38.0% in Q4 of 2024.

In addition to challenges in terms of women's economic empowerment, violence against women and girls also remains a significant concern, with high rates of gender-based violence and femicide persisting.

The Commission for Gender Equality indicates that the unequal distribution of care responsibilities reinforces traditional gender roles and perpetuates gender inequalities in the labour market. The heavy burden of unpaid care work often leads to women's exclusion or underrepresentation in the formal labour market, moreover, unpaid care work contributes to occupational segregation, where women are concentrated in low-paid and undervalued sectors⁹.

While South Africa has made significant strides in advancing gender equality, ensuring that equality, non-sexism and non-discrimination are enshrined in the Constitution, work is required to ensure tangible change in the lives of women and girls. Other key areas of progress includes:

- The enactment of gender-sensitive and responsive legislation
- The introduction of comprehensive social welfare provisions
- Commitment to gender mainstreaming through policies and programmes to broaden women's access to essential services, political representation and socio-economic prospects.

Enactment of Gender-sensitive legislation	Ratification of International Instruments	Policies and Plans	Institutional and Other mechanisms
- The Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act - Domestic Violence Act - The Employment Equity Act - The Labour Relations Act - The Basic Conditions of Employment Act - The Recognition of Customary Marriages Act - Civil Union Act - The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act - The Reform of Customary Law of Succession and Regulation of Related Matters Act - The Public Procurement Act	- The Beijing Platform of Action (BPfA) - The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) - C190 – Violence and Harassment Convention - The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women - The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development - The Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa	- South Africa's National Gender Policy Framework (NGPF) - o The promotion of women's rights and gender equality finds itself entrenched in South Africa's National Gender Policy Framework (NGPF) - The National Strategic Plan on Gender-based Violence and Femicide - o The National Strategic Plan on Gender-based Violence and Femicide (NSPGBVF) provides a cohesive strategic framework to guide the national response to the GBVF crisis in South Africa.	- The Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) - Department for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities - National Gender Machinery - Gender Focal Points Parliamentary Mechanisms: - Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities - Select Committee on Social Services (Health, Social Development, Women, Youth Development and Persons with Disabilities - Multi-party Women's Caucus Commitment to gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting and planning

⁹ https://cge.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/WOMEN-IN-THE-SOUTH-AFRICAN-ECONOMY-TEXT_signed-off.pdf

The Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities notes the following:

- More work should be done to accelerate equal representation, as women remain underrepresented in high-income sectors and continue to face significant wage gaps.
- To bridge the gap, there is a need to demonstrate actions to stronger policies on financial inclusion, access to credit, and workplace protections for women.
- Equipping women with tools and resources to start and grow businesses, manage household finances, and invest in their futures will strengthen their voices in decisions affecting them and narrow gender gaps in financial access while endorsing broader social and economic equality.

“Women’s economic empowerment is essential to achieving women’s rights and gender equality. Women’s economic empowerment means ensuring women can equally participate in and benefit from decent work and social protection; access markets and have control over resources, their own time, lives, and bodies; and increased voice, agency, and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels from the household to international institutions”¹⁰.

The United Nations calls on governments everywhere to act boldly and decisively for all women and girls. Excluding women and girls from development has high social and economic risks.

The following 6 actions can advance and accelerate gender equality:

1. A Digital Revolution

Governments should work towards closing the digital gender divide and ensure access to technology for women and girls. Support for the Global Digital Compact is encouraged.¹¹ Women and girls must be able to access new skills, opportunities and services, by bridging the digital gender gap and having equal access to digital technology, financial services, markets and networks.

2. Freedom from poverty

Nearly one in ten women live in extreme poverty. Improved public services and social protection expand economic opportunities and security for women. Recognising women’s unpaid care work and closing childcare and eldercare gaps in particular, will allow for women to participate in all facets of the economy and take up economic opportunities. It is thus important to invest in national budgets to strengthen social protection, public services, particularly care services, to give women an equal chance to prosper and fight poverty.

3. Zero Violence

One in three women experiences violence in her lifetime. Although legislation exists it is often poorly implemented and investment in prevention strategies is lacking. Governments must adopt, implement and fund national laws and policies that signal zero impunity towards violence against women and support local women's organisations.

¹⁰ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>

¹¹ Negotiated by 193 Member States and informed by global consultations, the Compact commits governments to upholding international law and human rights online and to taking concrete steps to make the digital space safe and secure.

4. Full and Equal Decision-Making Power

Globally women's representation and decision-making is hampered. Governments must implement laws and policies, as well as apply temporary special measures to increase the number of women in decision-making positions in politics, business and institutions.

5. For All Women and Girls—Peace and Security

Millions of women and girls live near armed conflict, with conflict-related sexual violence skyrocketing by 50 per cent last year alone. Women's organisations are the first responders to crises and champions of peace. Yet they remain underfunded and undervalued. Governments must adopt fully financed national plans to increase women's meaningful participation in all aspects of peace and security and fund women's organisations in crises and conflict settings.

6. For All Women and Girls—Climate Justice

As the climate crisis and biodiversity loss accelerate, women and girls—especially in rural and indigenous communities—bear the brunt of its devastating effects. They are also at the forefront of solutions. There is a need to prioritise women's and girls' rights and leadership in climate action by increasing investment in and their access to green jobs, like care, sustainable agriculture and renewable energy.

More than thirty years after democracy, thirty years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action and more than 50 years since the inception of International Women's Day, many challenges remain for women across the globe. To ensure that gender equality is accelerated, it is imperative that the actions noted above, as well as any other measures for women's participation and empowerment are implemented and resourced. Gender equality makes developmental and economic sense, and the full participation of half the world's population will lead to growth and inclusion.

References

- Commission for Gender Equality, 2024, Women in the South African Economy, https://cge.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/WOMEN-IN-THE-SOUTH-AFRICAN-ECONOMY-TEXT_signed-off.pdf
- Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2025, Parline database on women's representation – women speakers, <https://data.ipu.org/women-speakers/>
- Statistics South Africa, 2024, South African Women Struggle with Unemployment and Workforce Inequality
- Statistics South Africa, 2025, Quarterly Labour Force Survey, <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/Presentation%20QLFS%20Q4%202023.pdf>
- United Nations Women, 2025, Article: Never backing down: Women march forward for equal rights, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/timeline/never-backing-down-women-march-forward-for-equal-rights>
- United Nations Women, 2025, Women's Rights in Review 30 years after Beijing, [Women's rights in review 30 years after Beijing | Publications | UN Women – Headquarters](https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/timeline/never-backing-down-women-march-forward-for-equal-rights)
- United Nations, 2024, The Sustainable Development Report, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf>
- World Bank, 2024, Women, Business and the Law 2024, <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/wbl>
- World Economic Forum, 2024, Global Gender Gap 2024



PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA