



GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Key Human Rights Trends

INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) globally remains a pervasive violation of human rights with far-reaching consequences for individuals, communities, and countries. In 2022, of the 89,000 women intentionally killed globally, Africa had the highest number of reported femicides compared to other regions.¹ In southern Africa, 27% of women 15 years of age and older experienced physical, and/or sexual violence in their lifetime from an intimate partner.² The African Union's Agenda 2063 recognizes that GBV acts as a barrier to human security, peace and development.³ At the same time, there is an increasing call for urgent action to accelerate investments in women to end GBV.

GBV is a human rights violation that is deeply rooted in existing harmful social norms that promote gender inequality and discrimination. Following decades of advocacy by women's rights organisations, GBV is now globally considered as a violation of human rights and an affront to their dignity, safety, and well-being instead of merely an in-born vulnerability or a private matter in which States should not interfere. This advocacy also contributed to the adoption of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) General Recommendation no. 19⁴ on violence against women. As demonstrated by political statements and commitments, there is a heightened understanding that GBV has long-lasting often

intergenerational, consequences on the physical and mental health of women and girls as well as wider societal costs, which can carry across intergenerational.

This advocacy brief provides an overview of the trends in terms of GBV as a human rights violation in the sub-region. Although people of all genders can experience GBV, women and girls are disproportionately affected and therefore this brief will focus on this group specifically. The brief includes CEDAW recommendations on GBV for 14 countries in the sub-region. It also refers to existing national legislation, policies and actions addressing GBV against women and girls, while highlighting certain human rights protection gaps and providing recommendations for States, Southern African Development Community (SADC), civil society and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) to effectively address this violation of human rights.

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DEFINING GBV

GBV can be understood and interpreted broadly and encompasses various forms of violence such as, but not limited to, domestic violence, sexual violence, child marriage, and human trafficking. In general, it is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between two categories, women and men. The nature and extent of specific types of GBV vary across cultures, countries, and regions.⁵

There is a shared framing of violence against women and other forms of GBV in international and regional human rights instruments and mechanisms. For example, all countries in the southern African region have ratified the CEDAW. The Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (the Committee) has produced important guidance on this through its General Recommendations. The General Recommendations no. 12 and no. 19 (on violence against women), and no. 35 (on gender-based violence against women, updating General Recommendation no. 19) clarify the scope and meaning of articles 1-3, 5-6, 10-12, 14 and 16 within CEDAW. General Recommendation no. 19 defines GBV as “violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or violence that affects women disproportionately.” Furthermore, the General Recommendation No. 35⁶ (2017) on GBV against women, updating the General Recommendation No. 19, states that “women’s right to a life free from

gender-based violence is indivisible from and interdependent on other human rights, including the rights to life, health, liberty and security of the person, equality and equal protection within the family, freedom from torture, cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment, and freedom of expression, movement, participation, assembly and association”.

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women⁷ (1993) defines “violence against women” as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”.⁸

Like CEDAW, all countries in the southern Africa sub-region have acceded to the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa⁹ (2003), also known as the Maputo Protocol. This Protocol defines violence against women as “all acts perpetrated against women which cause or could cause them physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm, including the threat to take such acts; or to undertake the imposition of arbitrary restrictions on or deprivation of fundamental freedoms in private or public life in peace time and during situations of armed conflicts or of war”.

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PREVALENCE OF GBV

Based on Afrobarometer research in 2023¹⁰, across 39 countries in Africa, four out of ten respondents say that GBV is common in their community. In Angola (62%) and Namibia (57%) respondents said that violence against women is a common occurrence. However, the findings also reveal that while two-thirds of Africans say that it is never justified to use physical force to discipline their wives, only half think domestic violence should be treated as a criminal matter that requires the involvement of law enforcement, while the other half think it is a private matter that should be resolved within the family. It is also concerning that 44% of respondents in Mozambique and 39% Namibia said it is justified for men to physically discipline their wives. Respondents see GBV as the most important women's rights-related issue that their government should address, followed by more women in power, and inequalities in education and the workplace.

According to a joint UNODC and UN Women report on femicide¹¹, or the intentional killing of women, released in 2023¹², globally nearly 89,000 women and girls were intentionally killed in 2022, the highest yearly number recorded in the past two decades. Remarkably, although, since 2022, homicides generally have declined,

the number of female homicides has not. Furthermore, around 48,800 women and girls worldwide were killed by their intimate partners or other family members, which means that on average, more than 133 women or girls are killed every day by someone in their own family.¹³ Since first publishing regional estimates on femicide in 2013, in 2022, UNODC found that Africa surpassed Asia as the region with the highest number of victims in absolute terms.¹⁴

The global estimates for femicide published in 2022¹⁵, show that the rate is highest for Africa at 2.8 per 100,000, compared to Americas (1.5), Oceania (1.1), Asia (0.8) and Europe (0.6). It is concerning to see the lack of data for many of the countries in southern Africa, as shown in Figure 2, *pg.10*. The World Health Organization's global database on prevalence of violence against women¹⁶ consolidates intimate partner violence, classified as over a lifetime and within the last 12 months for women aged 15 – 49, as shown in Figure 2, *pg. 10*. The available dataset for Southern Africa highlights the inconsistency across countries in collecting up-to-date disaggregated data on violence against women, as there are many data gaps and the prevalence rates on intimate partner violence are from sources eight years or older.

STATE RESPONSIBILITY

Framing GBV as a human rights violation entails that the State has an obligation to address it. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) requires States to “exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and, in accordance with national legislation, punish acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the State or by private persons”. The Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action¹⁷(1994) also clearly urges States to commit to prevention. Since 1998, the Commission on the Status of Women has also made recommendations guiding States on their obligations to comprehensively address violence against women and girls.¹⁸

As a commitment to eradicate GBV, different southern African countries have signed and ratified international conventions, strategies, and policies¹⁹ that either implicitly or explicitly call for an end to GBV. All UN Member States including those from southern Africa agreed in 2015, as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to work towards eliminating violence against women, captured under the Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5)²⁰ on Gender Equality and specifically Target 5.2 on “eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation”.

The importance of ending GBV is a critical step towards creating an inclusive, prosperous and sustainable Africa, as emphasized in the African Union Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2040. As of February 2024, 45 African Union Member States have ratified the Maputo Protocol and in southern Africa, most recently, Botswana, ratified the Protocol, bringing universal ratification of the protocol in southern Africa.

These agendas are further aligned with the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2016) and the SADC Regional Strategy and Framework of Action for Addressing Gender Based Violence (2018-2030)²¹. The SADC Model Law on Gender-Based Violence²² also acts as a governance tool that would support Member States to develop or enact national GBV laws or revise or reform existing GBV laws to meet international, continental, and regional commitments to human rights and to end GBV.

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GBV AS A NATIONAL PRIORITY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Within the southern African region, at the country level, a high-level governmental commitment to end GBV has been observed for some countries. For instance:

Botswana has made a commitment at the 2019 Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 to reduce GBV from 37% to 20% for women and from 21% to 10% for men, which the government is aiming to achieve through effective implementation of the National Strategy Towards Ending GBV.

In **Eswatini**, during the opening of the 12th Parliament in February 2024, His Majesty Mswati III emphasised that beyond resources needed to implement a strategy on ending GBV, a change of attitude is needed by everyone in fostering cultural change and promoting equality for all. In his speech in 2023, King Mswati III emphasised the need to confront GBV as one of the drivers of HIV/AIDS. He further emphasised the need to use the same level of determination and collective responsibility to bring an end to violence against women and children as the nation did with HIV/AIDS.

In **South Africa**, in February 2024, the President has, during the State of the Nation Address, described GBV as the country's 'second pandemic' and called to intensify collective efforts to bring it to an end.²³ He also directly oversees the implementation of the National Strategic Plan on GBV and Femicide, which has been rolled out since 2020 as a multi-stakeholder, whole-of-society approach led by Government with intrinsic engagement of civil society, private sector, traditional/religious sector and development partners.

In **Zimbabwe**, in 2021, the President signed the High-Level Political Compact on ending GBV by 2030. The President declared GBV a national emergency and reaffirmed his commitment and that of the government of Zimbabwe and its partners towards total eradication of all forms of GBV/HPs by 2030²⁴.

NATIONAL GBV LEGISLATION

Although in certain countries a high-level governmental commitment to end GBV is expressed, only a few southern African countries have implemented dedicated laws criminalizing GBV offenses, showcasing differing levels of specificity and emphasis. Many States typically address distinct GBV crimes individually within their legal structures.

Among the States with specific GBV legislation, examples such as Madagascar, South Africa, and Zambia stand out. These countries have enacted laws tailored to combat GBV, encompassing various forms of violence against women and girls. For instance, in South Africa over the last year a set of three, "Gender-Based Violence Amendment Acts" (GBV Amendment Acts) came into effect.²⁵ Zambia issued an Anti-Gender-Based Violence Act in 2011. In 2019, Madagascar adopted a law that criminalizes "physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence within the family, including traditional practices harmful to both sexes".

However, most States in the sub-region demonstrate a more indirect approach to addressing GBV within their legal frameworks. Related criminal activities to GBV are predominantly outlined across a wide range of national

legal instruments while most countries have provisions on domestic violence.²⁶ Although domestic violence is part of GBV, the latter is wider in scope, encompassing more criminal activities and different types of perpetrators, which requires a more expansive approach and inclusivity of the circumstances than domestic violence alone. The domestic violence acts coupled with criminal and penal codes-related provisions form the main legal basis for the criminalization of GBV.

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NATIONAL POLICIES AND ACTION PLANS

The region displays a diverse landscape of GBV policies and action plans, with some countries demonstrating comprehensive strategies while others are facing significant challenges in implementation and coordination. Currently, 12 out of 14 countries have relevant National Action Plans in place, although several are no longer up to date, and some are under revision.²⁷

Botswana, Eswatini and South Africa have prioritized multi-sectoral approaches which engage all actors in society as critical partners in addressing GBV. This includes holistic and coordinated quality health care, justice, policing, and social services for survivors, while strengthening the enabling environment for institutions to uphold their obligations, as well as monitoring progress against the plans. Many plans recognize the distinct and important role of engaging the women and girls most affected by violence through partnership with women's rights and civil society organizations, as well as the need for collaborative efforts to engage community members across generations, private sector actors and involve men and boys as individuals as well as in their diverse roles within communities. Countries like Madagascar and

Mozambique have established specific platforms and strategies to coordinate GBV prevention and response activities. Malawi and Zimbabwe have implemented a combination of policies and strategies to address GBV.

Disparities among countries in the region exist still in the level of specificity and focus of GBV initiatives. While countries like Botswana, Eswatini, South Africa and Zimbabwe have well-defined strategies and action plans targeting GBV, others have more generalized approaches and or lack costed action plans for implementation, as seen in the cases of Seychelles and Zambia. This variation in approach may impact the effectiveness of GBV interventions and highlight the need for encouraging more comprehensive approaches at the national level with political leadership to guide actions, coordination among responsible institutions, and use of existing guidelines and frameworks, such as the SADC Regional Strategy and Framework of Action for Addressing Gender Based Violence (2018-2030) for supporting greater progress among the countries in the region.



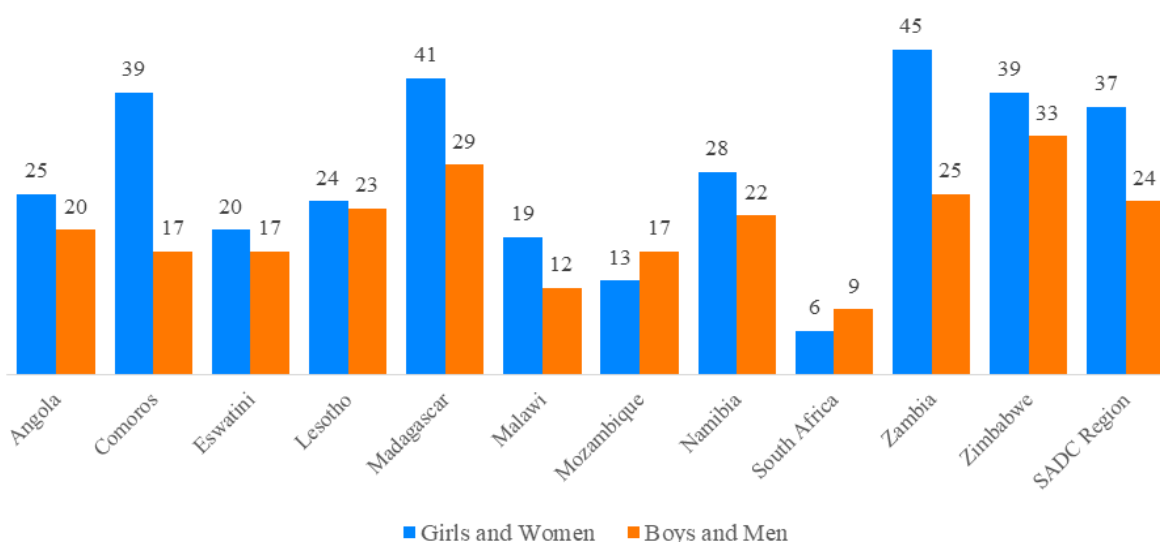
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DRIVERS OF GBV

GBV is caused by systematic gender inequality and discrimination against women which is manifested at different levels of society and cannot be explained by one single factor. In the southern African region, the pervasiveness of GBV is strongly related to patriarchal social structures, norms, and practices marked by deep-rooted discrimination and gender inequality. Other challenges in the region contributing to GBV include high poverty, patriarchal religious beliefs, conflicts and historical structural violence, alcohol abuse, and lack of legal protection for the most marginalized groups, including women and girls. The different forms of violence (e.g. child marriage, sexual assault, intimate partner violence) also overlap to increase a woman or girls' risk of multiple forms of violence throughout their life.

In the southern African region, according to a UNICEF report,²⁸ violence against women is underpinned by social norms that reinforce gender-based inequalities and girls and women face specific types of violence that are both a consequence of this inequality and that act as a mechanism through which their subordinate status in society is perpetuated. Based on the UNICEF report,²⁹ girls and women in most countries in the sub-region are more likely to justify wife-beating than boys and men, a reflection of how patriarchal norms are socialized and reinforced with women and girls to maintain men's power over women (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Percentage of girls and women and boys and men aged 15 to 49 years who think that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances. (UNICEF)



Also, femicide is one of the most extreme forms of violence and reflects how the combined risk factors existing at the level of the individual, interpersonal relations, community, and society can result in a violation of the most basic human rights, namely the right to life, liberty and personal security. As with other forms of GBV, femicide research highlights how the form of violence is perpetuated through the complex interaction of risk factors such as the condition and behaviour of persons involved, how they relate to each other, the presence or lack of dedicated services as well as the dominant representation of male and female roles in society, as well as various grounds of discrimination such as ethnicity, religion, disability, refugee status, among others.

The southern African region shares other characteristics which could be seen as common drivers of gender inequality, violence, and impunity (see Figure 3, pg. 11):

Four countries fall within the **low human development category** for the human development index (Mozambique, Madagascar, Malawi, Lesotho);

For the **gender inequality index**, which measures gender-based disadvantages in three dimensions, namely reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market, ten countries (Mozambique [185], Madagascar [173], Malawi [169], Lesotho [168], Comoros [156], Zambia [154], Angola [148], Zimbabwe [146], Eswatini [144], Namibia [139] rank in the bottom-half of the index out of 191 countries.³⁰

Extreme poverty is also highest in Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, Lesotho and Angola; and eight of the countries (South Africa, Namibia, Zambia, Eswatini, Botswana, Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe)³¹ fall in the top 20 regarding inequality based on the GINI Index, globally.

IMPACT OF GBV

Awareness about the impact of GBV against women and girls around the world is growing. It has a long-term effect on both GBV survivors and their families leading to mental and physical harm. In the case of rape or sexual assault, the survivor can be faced with unwanted pregnancies and other medical problems, including the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmittable diseases, which infringes their sexual and reproductive health and rights. GBV can lead to anxiety, self-harm, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Furthermore, it contributes to stigmatisation and discrimination but also negatively impacts the ability of survivors to participate in society.

The economic costs of GBV extend from the individual who experiences violence in terms of the short and long-term costs of health, justice and social supports, lost productivity, absence from education, with costs



extending to their children and other family members, perpetrators, and for the State as a whole.³² The World Bank (WB)³³ has estimated the economic impact of violence against women and girls to these countries up to 3.7% of their GDP. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) violence against women and girls has a multi-dimensional effect³⁴ on the overall health of an economy both in the short-term and the long-term and shows that in sub-Saharan Africa, violence against women is a major threat³⁵ to economic development in a region where domestic violence is widespread. The IMF research³⁶ also finds that the economic cost of violence against women is higher in countries where the gender gap in education between partners is high. Addressing violence against women and girls needs ambitious investments to scale-up prevention programmes and implement comprehensive policies for addressing GBV.



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KEY CHALLENGES TO ADDRESSING GBV

There are a range of UN human rights mechanisms that can be used to advance the rights of women and girls including protecting them from GBV. The CEDAW Committee has made significant contributions through its general comments and through its concluding observations that include recommendations to States.

Based on and inspired by the latest CEDAW reports for countries in the sub-region, the key issues regarding GBV in the sub-region can be clustered around the following areas:

Access to justice/legislation/implementation:

- Failure or lack of existing legislation to comprehensively prohibit all forms of GBV against women and girls in the public and private spheres.
- Marital rape is not recognized in all countries by law as a criminal offence.
- Low numbers of investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of perpetrators in GBV cases against women and girls.
- Lack of training for judges, prosecutors and police officers on the strict application of criminal law provisions on GBV against women and girls.

Societal/patriarchal attitudes/practices/norms:

- Underreporting of incidents of GBV against women and girls owing to the social legitimization of violence, a culture of silence and impunity.
- Social legitimization of domestic violence and the frequent resort to reconciliation within the extended family, which contributes to high percentage of complaints withdrawn by victims and survivors of domestic violence.
- Insufficient focus on transforming the underlying gender inequality and power imbalances within relationships, families, community, institutional

and state structures, as well as limited attention to address the factors contributing to GBV, such as alcohol abuse and unemployment and the interplay between different forms of violence and harmful practices (e.g. child marriage and intimate partner violence).

Access to quality multisectoral response services:

- Inadequate assistance and remedies offered to women seeking to escape violent relationships, which is reflected by the insufficient number of shelters available for GBV victims and survivors.
- Stigmatization of GBV victims and survivors by health professionals and law enforcement officers, legal illiteracy, and a lack of trust in law enforcement.
- Lack of medical and psychological support services specifically for victims and survivors of GBV.

Disaggregated data

- Lack of disaggregated data on the number of reported, investigated, and prosecuted cases of GBV including domestic violence and on sentences imposed.
- Lack of observatories and or monitoring mechanisms on GBV.
- Lack of data on intersecting forms of discrimination that certain groups face such as lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women and intersex persons, refugee women, women and adolescent girls living with HIV, women with disabilities, women and girls with albinism, and women human rights defenders and activists.



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CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED BY SADC

The SADC Regional Strategy and Framework of Action for addressing GBV 2018 – 2030³⁷ aims to provide a holistic and coordinated approach to addressing GBV in the sub-region and is intended to stimulate sub-regional interventions and to harmonize GBV responses by all SADC Member States. It highlights the following challenges to effective GBV response in the region:

- High withdrawal of GBV cases and prolonged period for GBV cases in court.
- Failure to translate policies and laws into effective GBV interventions.
- Insufficient disaggregated data and lack of clear minimum standards for GBV reporting, referral and case management.
- Weak institutional arrangements for coordinating SADC sub-region multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder and decentralised GBV response.
- Limited involvement of men and boys in GBV prevention and response.
- Underreporting due to social norms, beliefs, including inadequate strategies to address social and cultural practises as well as norms that perpetuate GBV.
- Inadequate financial and human resources to support implementation of GBV interventions, high cost of GBV programming, which impacts implementation.

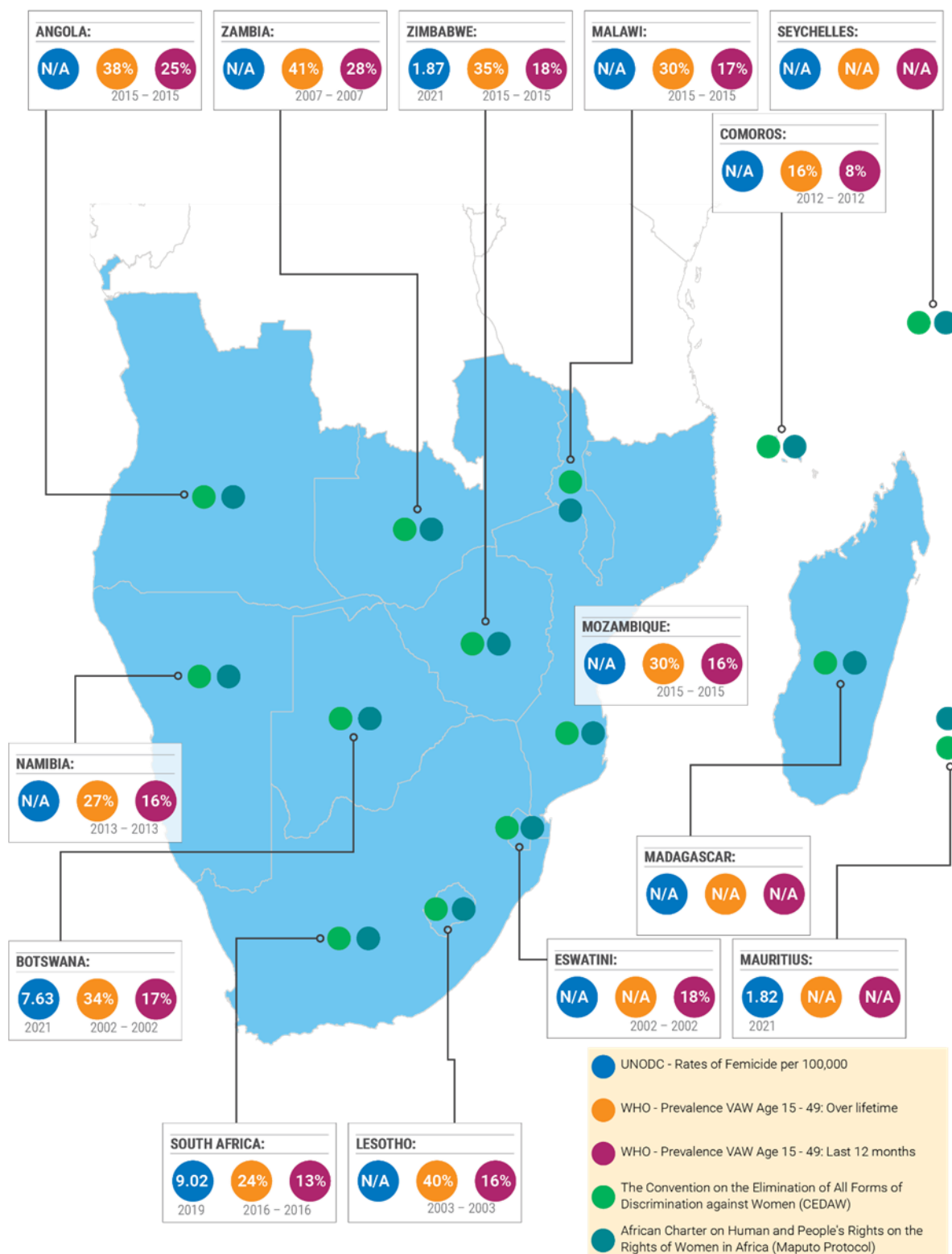
HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED AND GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING

Despite these significant costs, the investment by States to address the issue is inadequate. Only 27 countries track and have dedicated budgets for gender equality and women's empowerment in line with SDG Indicator 5.c.1.³⁸ Of the 14 countries in southern Africa, only 5 have reported against this indicator as of 2023, highlighting the need for greater investments in gender-responsive budgeting as part of efforts to end GBV.³⁹ Globally, Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members committed USD 458 million per year on average over 2020-21 for ending violence against women and girls, equating to only 0,3% of their total ODA.⁴⁰ According to the OECD's analysis, 99% of gender-related ODA fails to reach local women's rights organizations

(WROs) and feminist movements.⁴¹ The UN 2023 Report on the SDGs noted that without dedicated investment, countries will not achieve the target of eliminating violence against women and girls by 2030.⁴²

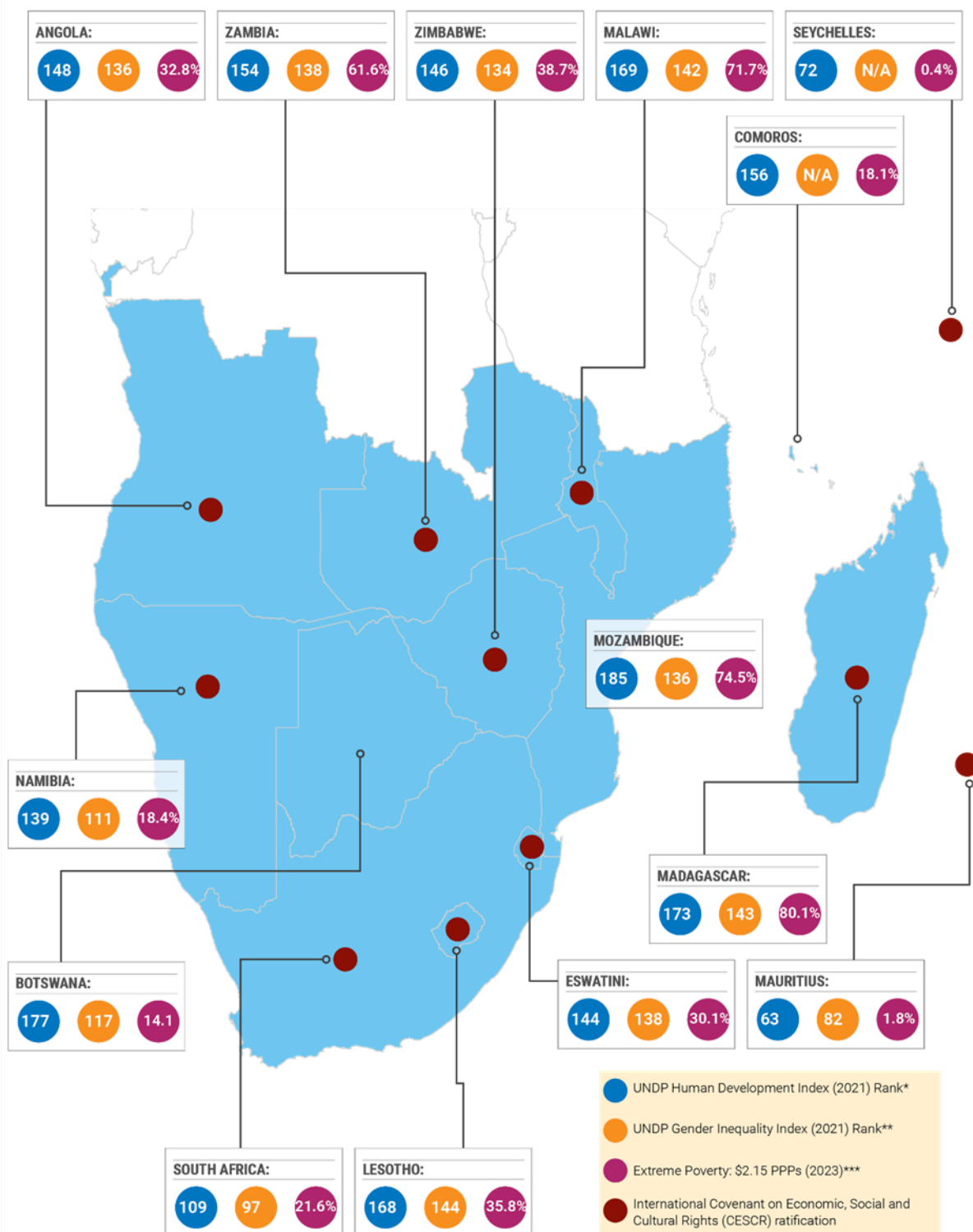
Only 5 countries in southern Africa report against SDG Indicator 5.c.1 – **track** and have **dedicated budgets** for gender equality and women's empowerment

Figure 2 Rates of femicide (UNODC) and (WHO) prevalence rates of violence against women (physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence over lifetime and last 12 months indicators)



* UNODC rates are from 2019, 2021, 2022 for the countries with data. ** WHO data is the latest data available for countries, year of source is indicated on the map for where data is available. The boundaries and names shown and designations used on the maps in this document do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Figure 3 Select indicators on Human Development Index, Gender Inequality Index and Extreme Poverty for the southern Africa sub-region (various sources)



* A composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development—a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living. Ranking out of 191 countries.

** GII is a composite metric of gender inequality using three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. Ranking out of 191 countries.

*** The international poverty line is set at \$2.15 per person per day using 2017 prices. This means that anyone living on less than \$2.15 a day is in extreme poverty.

The boundaries and names shown and designations used on the maps in this document do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.



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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is crucial that comprehensive and coordinated measures are taken in the southern African region to protect and uphold the human rights of women and girls in all their diversity and to address effectively GBV on both the national and at sub-regional level. A whole of society and holistic multisectoral human rights-based, gender sensitive and victim and survivor-centred approach is paramount. States have an obligation to invest, undertake, coordinate and monitor legislative, administrative and institutional measures for the prevention and response to GBV. Regional bodies such as the SADC can support Member States to uphold their obligations by encouraging monitoring and reporting against the implementation of the SADC Regional Strategy on GBV as set out in its Framework (2018-2030). In addition, there are a range of UN human rights mechanisms that can be used to advance the rights of women and girls including protecting them from GBV. In particular, the CEDAW committee has made significant contributions through its general recommendations and through its concluding observations that provide guidance to States.

Efforts to address GBV must be framed within a human-rights based and gender transformative approach. It is essential that those most affected by GBV, specifically women and girls who face multiple forms of discrimination and their diverse experiences, are informing the design of initiatives and decisions as it relates to addressing GBV. Meaningful and safe consultations⁴³ with rights-holders, in this case women and girls at risk of GBV, including those facing multiple forms of discrimination⁴⁴, are key when identifying the protection gaps, needs and concerns and may serve as a tool of empowerment, recognition and redress.

Furthermore, the presence of legislative gaps in specific countries highlights the imperative for additional endeavours aimed at strengthening human rights legal frameworks to address GBV. This requires both enacting explicit GBV legislation as well as legislation to address gender inequality and discrimination within laws and institutional practices in all sectors and structures in society which enable GBV to take place.

A comprehensive approach to address GBV should include the design and implementation of national action plans or strategies dedicated to the prevention, risk mitigation and response to GBV (including addressing issues of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment). Such plans provide a framework for States to ensure coordinated and comprehensive action by relevant institutions and actors to address GBV. Additionally, GBV should be mainstreamed as a priority in overarching gender equality strategies, with the production and use of data to monitor and report on changes and assess the impact of policies and programmes over time.

The legal and policy framework should be accompanied by investment in evidence-based prevention interventions to stop violence before it takes place and quality essential multi-sectoral services for victims and survivors. This includes ensuring the availability of quality essential health care, social services (such as shelters and helplines, psychosocial and economic support), protection and access to justice. It also requires an investment in diverse women's rights organizations and movements as key actors for ending GBV.

Considering the challenges to addressing GBV in southern Africa and building upon CEDAW recommendations to Member States and priority actions identified under the Generation Equality Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence,

States are encouraged to take the following actions:

RESPECT This means they must refrain from interfering with or curtailing the enjoyment of human rights, such as committing acts of GBV and enacting and implementing laws and policies that contribute to GBV.

PROTECT It requires States to protect individuals and groups against human rights abuses and to exercise due diligence in preventing, punishing, and redressing GBV committed by private parties.

FULFILL States must investigate promptly and thoroughly all cases of GBV and ensure an enabling environment where GBV is prevented, and access to legal, health and social services is upheld.



Specifically, States should:

1. Create enabling policy, legal and resource environments:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive national legal framework in line with international human rights standards that prohibits and prevents GBV in all its forms including the criminalization of marital rape, forced sterilization and virginity testing.
- Support the establishment of local ‘Femicide Watch’⁴⁵ or Observatories, and Femicide Reviews.
- Generate disaggregated data on different forms of violence, and the different groups of women and girls experiencing GBV as crucial elements to inform programmes and track progress.

2. Scale up evidence-driven prevention programming:

- Increase investments in evidence-based interventions and strategies⁴⁶ to prevent violence through comprehensive prevention policies and domestic financing.
- Promote social cohesion and cross-sectoral work to transform social and gender norms, attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate violence against women, including through targeted interventions to transform patriarchal masculinities.
- Work with the education sector to prevent GBV against women and girls in all their diversity by ensuring that schools and educational institutions are safe for all girls, adolescents and young women, and implement prevention strategies that promote gender equality, challenge gender stereotypes and foster equitable norms, attitudes and beliefs from a young age, including through gender-sensitive curricula and comprehensive sexuality education.

3. Expand comprehensive, accessible and quality services for victims and survivors:

- Enhance the accessibility of GBV services including social welfare, justice, education and the health sectors, among others, including by strengthening capacities of law enforcement officers, judiciary, social workers, health professionals to provide accessible, quality essential services to victims and survivors of GBV.
- Enhance access to justice for victims and survivors of GBV including by enabling their participation in judicial processes.
- Strengthen victim and survivor support services, including adequately funded shelters and safe houses, in particular, in rural and remote areas and operationalize victim and survivor-centred and gender-sensitive approaches in support and income-generating opportunities for victims at all the different stages of accountability processes.

4. Enable and empower autonomous girl-led and women’s rights organizations to channel their expertise for ending GBV:

- Increase investments in women’s rights movements toward enhancing sustained, core and flexible funding to diverse women’s rights organizations and networks working to end GBV.
- Protect the role of women’s rights organizations and movements in their critical work to prevent and eliminate GBV and ensure they can operate without discrimination and the threat of violence.
- Recognize and collaborate with diverse women and girl-led organizations, including those representing the most marginalized women and girls, as part of comprehensive approaches to end GBV.



SADC is encouraged to take the following actions:

- Promote cross-border collaboration between Member States and alignment of GBV strategies and policies with existing regional standards.
- Hold Member States accountable for the implementation of GBV related national and international commitments.
- Produce evidence and advise Member States and other actors on effective strategies to address GBV.
- Enhance collaboration with women's rights and other civil society organizations working on GBV to support joint advocacy, knowledge exchange and monitoring of progress against GBV commitments.



Civil society and National Human Rights Institutions are encouraged to take the following actions:

- Empower and support women and girls to use their agency, to know their rights and to have access to justice, while mobilizing all actors to challenge harmful attitudes and behaviours that contribute to GBV.
- Support States in the implementation of existing strategies and policies to end GBV and encourage more systematic and coordinated mechanisms for monitoring progress on the issue.
- Advocate for policies and laws that protect the rights of women and girls, challenge harmful cultural norms that perpetuate violence, and promote women's participation in politics, law and policymaking, while also engaging civil society organizations in shaping relevant legislation.
- Contribute to building evidence through research, which can draw upon priorities identified in the Africa Shared Research Agenda for ending GBV.⁴⁷
- Use the national and UN human rights mechanisms to promote government accountability on addressing GBV.



United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies are encouraged to:

- Enhance system-wide collaboration on addressing GBV through joint programming and initiatives to promote accountability to existing commitments at both the national and sub-regional level, drawing upon existing United Nations frameworks for addressing GBV.⁴⁸
- Conduct joint advocacy with Member States and diverse stakeholders to promote holistic human rights-based, gender-transformative, victim- and survivor centred approach for the prevention and response to GBV in the southern African region.
- Promote greater visibility, engagement and meaningful participation of women and girls most affected by GBV and the organizations representing these groups in relevant decision-making, policy and programmatic platforms.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ UN Women, UNODC. (2023). Gender-related killings of women and girls (femicide/ feminicide), 2022, UNODC.
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- ³ African Union. Agenda 2063, document at (au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36204-doc-agenda2063_popular_version_en.pdf)
- ⁴ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). 1992. CEDAW General Recommendation No. 19: Violence against women, document A/47/38 at 1
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- ⁸ Ibid. (article 2), violence against women is explained to be understood for instance:
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 - Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;
 - Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.
- ⁹ African Union. Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003)
- ¹⁰ Afrobarometer. News Release. Combating gender-based violence tops Africa's agenda for women's rights. 22 November 2023
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