



Deputy Prime Minister's Office

THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI COUNTRY PROGRESS REPORT

IMPLEMENTATION OF BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION (BPfA +30)

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and Family Issues

July 2024

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Acknowledgements

Foreword

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Acronyms

| | |
|-----------|--|
| AIDS | Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome |
| ANC | Antenatal care |
| ART | Antiretroviral therapy |
| BpFA | Beijing Declaration Platform for Action |
| CANGO | Coordinating Assembly of Non-Governmental Organizations |
| CEDWA | Convention on the Elimination of All of Discrimination Against Women |
| CSO | Civil Society Organization |
| DPMO | Deputy Prime Minister's Offices |
| EBC | Elections and Boundaries Commission |
| EBIS | Eswatini Broadcasting Information Services |
| ECCDE | Early childhood care and development and education |
| FPE | Free primary education |
| GBV | Gender-based violence |
| GoE | Government of Eswatini |
| HIV | Human Immunodeficiency Virus |
| ILFS | Integrated Labour Force Survey |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| MICS | Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey |
| MoET | Ministry of Education and Training |
| MoH | Ministry of Health |
| MICT | Ministry of Information Communication and Technology |
| MSME | Micro small and medium enterprises |
| NDP | National Development Plan |
| NDS | National Development Strategy |
| NGP | National Gender Policy |
| NSSV | National Surveillance System on Violence |
| OVC | Orphan and vulnerable child |
| PLHIV | People Living with HIV |
| PMTCT | Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission |
| PWD | Persons living with disability |
| SHIMS III | Swaziland HIV Incidence Measurement Survey III |
| SME | Small medium enterprise |
| SODVA | Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act |
| SRH | Sexual reproductive health |
| STEM | Science technology engineering mathematics |
| SWAGAA | Swatini Action Group Against Abuse |

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| | |
|--------|---|
| SRWA | Swaziland Rural Women Assembly |
| TOR | Terms of reference |
| TVET | Technical and vocational education and training |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund |
| UPR | Universal Periodic Review |
| VAW | Violence against women |
| VACS | Violence Against Children and Youth Survey |
| WLSA | Women and Law in Southern Africa |
| WHO | World Health Organization |

Introduction

In 1995, the world witnessed a pivotal moment in the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment with the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. This landmark declaration, agreed upon by 189 countries, laid out a comprehensive agenda aimed at accelerating progress towards achieving gender equality and improving the status of women globally. The Declaration called for concrete actions across various critical areas, urging signatory states to commit to transformative measures (United Nations, 1995). Joining the 189 states, the Kingdom of Eswatini adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) which called on the Governments, the private sector, civil society organizations, development partners and all concerned global citizens to end gender discrimination and promote women's rights.

In 2025, the global community will mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of BPfA, and 10 years of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. As a member state to this framework, Eswatini committed to ensuring that a gender perspective is reflected in all legal frameworks such as national laws, policies and programmes to create an inclusive and equitable environment for all Emaswati, especially women and marginalized individuals with diverse sexualities and gender identities. Through collaboration and collective action, the state has made progress in addressing systemic barriers and discrimination that hinder the full realization of gender equality and with intent to unlock the potential of communities and contribute to sustainable development for all women and girls.

As we reflect on Eswatini's progress since the 2019 progress report, it is essential to assess how these commitments have been translated into tangible outcomes. This 2024 progress report aims to evaluate the strides made, identify ongoing challenges, and outline future priorities to continue advancing the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, ensuring that gender equality and women's empowerment remain at the forefront of our national agenda. Through this comprehensive analysis of the country's performance in the 12 critical areas of concern prescribed by the 1995 BPfA, the country will be able to better strategize and allocate resources effectively to address areas which require further attention and strengthen our commitment to achieving

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gender equality and women's empowerment in Eswatini. In this regard, various government ministries, development partner agencies, civil society organizations and other stakeholders were consulted to provide relevant data and information to this report. Figure 1 (below) shows the relationship between the BPfA's 12 critical areas of concern and selected SDGs



The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action outlined twelve critical areas of concern, each demanding targeted interventions and policy frameworks to eliminate barriers to gender equality.

These areas include:



1. Women and Poverty: Addressing the disproportionate burden of poverty on women by promoting economic policies that provide opportunities for women to rise out of poverty and by ensuring women's access to economic resources.



2. Education and Training of Women: Ensuring equal access to education for girls and women, improving the quality of education, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for women to enhance their skills and capacities.



3. Women and Health: Guaranteeing women's access to quality healthcare services, including reproductive health services, and addressing gender-specific health issues to improve overall health outcomes for women.



4. Violence Against Women: Implementing measures to prevent and respond to violence against women, including domestic violence, trafficking, and other forms of abuse, while ensuring survivors have access to justice and support services.



5. Women and Armed Conflict: Protecting the rights of women in conflict situations, promoting their participation in peace processes, and addressing the impact of armed conflict on women.



6. Women and the Economy: Promoting women's economic independence and equal access to employment opportunities, resources, and markets, while ensuring fair wages and working conditions.



7. Women in Power and Decision-Making: Increasing women's participation in political and public life, ensuring their representation in decision-making positions at all levels.



8. Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women: Establishing and strengthening national and international mechanisms to promote gender equality and monitor progress.



9. Human Rights of Women: Ensuring the full realization of women's human rights, eliminating discrimination, and addressing gender-based violence.



10. Women and the Media: Promoting balanced and non-stereotypical portrayals of women in the media and ensuring women's access to and participation in media and communication technologies.



11. Women and the Environment: Recognizing the role of women in environmental conservation and sustainable development and ensuring their participation in environmental decision-making processes.



12. The Girl Child: Addressing the specific needs and rights of girls, eliminating discrimination, and promoting their empowerment and well-being.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action served as a blueprint for nations to develop and implement policies, programs, and strategies to promote gender equality and empower women. It compelled signatory states to:

- a. **Enact and Enforce Legislation:** Develop and implement laws and policies that protect women's rights and promote gender equality.
- b. **Allocate Resources:** Ensure adequate funding and resources are allocated to gender equality initiatives and women's empowerment programs.
- c. **Establish Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms:** Create systems to monitor progress, evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, and hold stakeholders accountable.
- d. **Foster Partnerships:** Collaborate with civil society organizations, private sector entities, and international bodies to advance gender equality goals.
- e. **Promote Gender Mainstreaming:** Integrate gender perspectives into all areas of policymaking and program implementation to ensure that gender equality is a fundamental consideration in all development efforts.

The Structure of the report

The structure of the report follows the reporting guidelines provided by the UN Women Beijing +30 Guidance Note, as follows:

Section 1: Provides a synthesis, highlighting the core elements of Eswatini’s review process over the past five years (2019-2024).

Section 2: Provides a macro analysis of priorities, achievements, challenges and setbacks, with a focus on the past five years, as well as new and emerging priorities for the future.

Section 3: Provides a more detailed analysis of measures taken to advance gender equality across the twelve critical areas of concern of the BPfA with a focus on the last five years.

Section 4: Covers national processes and mechanisms, linking those related to the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Section 5: Highlights progress on the availability of data disaggregated by sex and gender statistics, linking the monitoring of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Section 6: Presents forward-looking reflections on future challenges and priority actions that are needed to accelerate the implementation of the BPfA and the 2030 Agenda, notably as part of the decade of action for sustainable development.

Section 1: Priorities, Achievements, Challenges and Setbacks

1.1. Eswatini Context

1.2.1. Gender equality

Gender equality is a complex issue in Eswatini. The Global Gender Index of 2023 notes that Eswatini ranks 47th out of 146 countries on gender equality.¹ This is influenced by a combination of social, cultural, economic and political factors. Responding to, and regardless of, these challenges, the Kingdom of Eswatini has made significant strides in promoting gender equality, particularly in the legal and policy frameworks, creating a conducive environment for advancing gender equality. For instance, the National Constitution, enacted in 2005, has provisions (Chapter III in particular) which protect the rights and freedom of women.

More recently, the country has launched the National Gender Policy (NGP) in 2023. This 10-year policy (2023-2033) outlines the country's vision for gender equality and provides guidance and tools for stakeholders and institutions in all sectors to mainstream gender and advance gender equality and equity. The NGP 2023 recognizes the twelve critical areas of concerns defined in the BPfA as a relevant framework for Eswatini to implement action on gender equality.

The Government has not only enacted legislation that domesticates the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) but has made strides in legislative reform and policies to address challenges of gender inequalities in the country. These include:

- The People Trafficking and People Smuggling Act of 2011
- The Child Protection and Welfare Act of 2012
- The Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act 2018
- The Employment Act of 1980 (an Employment Act Amendment Bill is currently under review)

¹World Economic Forum. Global Gender Gap Report 2014

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The following table outlines specific gender equality areas where Eswatini has made notable progress:

Table 1: Summary of Eswatini’s progress in gender equality areas:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Legal and policy framework | The Constitution of Swaziland, 2005, guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination based on gender. ² The Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act of 2018 The review of the National Gender Policy 2023 |
| Education and empowerment | Efforts have been made to reduce gender disparities in education, although challenges such as early marriage, transactional and intergenerational relationships, and teenage pregnancy still affect girls’ primary and secondary education. |
| Economic participation | Women's participation in the labour force has increased over the years, and there have been efforts to promote women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment through various programs and initiatives. ³ STEM programmes have been introduced to encourage women to explore other trades. |
| Political representation | Women's representation in political decision-making remains low in Eswatini. While there have been some gains, such as the appointment of women to ministerial positions (including the Deputy Prime Minister) and local government roles, women are still underrepresented in parliament and other decision-making bodies. ⁴ |
| Gender-based violence | Gender-based violence remains a significant challenge in Eswatini, affecting women and girls disproportionately. ⁵ Efforts to address this issue include legal reforms, awareness campaigns, and the provision of support services for survivors and their families. |
| Addressing social and cultural norms | Traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms continue to influence the social interactions in Eswatini and marginalizing women. Sustainable efforts have been made through education, awareness raising and community engagement through gender dialogues conducted by civil society organizations. |

In an effort to further advance the agenda on gender quality, the government has signed several international treaties and conventions as well as instruments that seek to promote women’s

² Equality before the law 20. (1) All persons are equal before and under the law in all spheres of political, economic, social and cultural life and in every other respect and shall enjoy equal protection of the law.

³ Integrated Labour Force Survey (ILFS), 2021

⁴ Eswatini CESER Report June 2024









⁵ National Strategy to End Violence 2023-2027

empowerment and gender equality. These include: the Convention of the elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of 1981, the United National Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of 2015 with specific Goal 5 on achieving gender equality, the Protocols to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa 2005, the African Union Agenda 2063 and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development 2008.

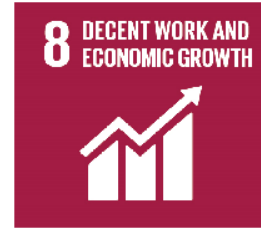
2.1.2. Eswatini’s Progress on SDG 5 – Gender Equality

The Government of Eswatini supports the implementation of the 2030 Agenda the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as agreed by all member states. In relation to advancing gender equality, the country has made significant progress in the four priority indicators of SDG 5. The following table shows the countries progress since 2014:

Table 2: SDG Dashboard and Trends 2024

| Indicator | Value | Latest Year with data | Rating | Trend |
|--|-------|-----------------------|---|---|
| Demand for family planning satisfied by modern methods (% of female aged 15-49) | 82.9 | 2014 |  |  |
| Ratio of Females-to-Male mean years of education received (%) | 102.8 | 2022 |  |  |
| Ration of female-to male labour force participation rate (%) | 86.7 | 2023 |  |  |
| Seats held by women in National Parliament (%) | 21.6 | 2024 |  |  |

Eswatini has developed the SDG Accelerated Recovery Plan (2023-2030) to be able to meet the SDG deadline in 2030. The Government, through the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, has reaffirmed commitment to the global goals at the SDG Summit held in New York in September 2023. Eswatini has prioritized three SDG targets including increased women in leadership (5.5), improved sanitation (6.2) and creation of descent jobs (8.5) to accelerate progress towards 2030. Nine accelerators were identified including the transformation in the following systems: digital, agricultural, educational, social protection, environmental, energy, industrial, health, water and sanitation and hygiene.



While significant progress has been made, challenges and parities persist because of strong patriarchal and other practices that marginalize women, girls and people of diverse sexualities. There are gender stereotypes and attitudes which continue to subordinate women such as: *angasitjelani umfati* (what can a woman tell us), *'udvodzile lomfati'* (the woman thinks like a man idea), *'livi lendvodza ekugcine'* (a final word is uttered by a man).⁶ These idioms and practices do not only prevail in traditional settings but are observed in workplaces. These practices undermine women's capacity to contribute and fully participate in the development agenda. The country has made progress in the issue of land rights, women can access land through the *Kukhonta* system without male representation which, in part, addresses the issue of relegating females into subordinate status in society.

The Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini has institutionalized gender equality and women's empowerment under the Deputy Prime Minister's Office (DPMO), Department of Gender and Family Issues (DGFI). The DGFI works as the national mechanism to ensure that there is country level coordination of gender mainstreaming, mobilization and empowerment of women through civil society and ensuring accountability on all issues relating to gender equality. In order to carry out this function, the National Gender Policy has been reviewed in 2023 and was adopted as a framework that will guide the mainstreaming of gender in all sectors.

Through the National Gender Policy (2023), the Government has committed itself to promote gender equality and monitor the mainstream of gender in all sectors through the implementation of action the following the key strategic areas:

I. Family and Socialization

⁶ Eswatini Gender Profile 2022

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- II. Poverty and Women’s Economic Empowerment (Productive Resources and Employment)
- III. Health, Reproductive Rights and HIV/AIDS
- IV. Education and Training
- V. Legal and Human Rights
- VI. Politics and Decision Making (Governance)
- VII. Gender Based Violence
- VIII. Science Technology Engineering Mathematics & Innovation
- IX. Environment, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction, Mitigation and Response
- X. Trade (Intra-Africa and Global Trade)
- XI. Women, Peace and Security
- XII. Girl Child

The implementation of the NGP 2023 is a collaborative responsibility, through a multi-sector approach and including functional structures such as the Gender Focal Points within government ministries, the Gender Consortium under the Coordinating Assembly of Non-Governmental Organizations (CANGO) and the private sector. Development partners, through structures like International Development Partners Platform and the UN Gender Theme Group, play a role in supporting the implementation of national gender program through financial and technical support.

While the large majority of the population support gender equality in employment, land ownership and participation in leadership and decision-making positions, almost half consider that women will be victims of criticism and harassment if they run for elections according to a survey conducted in 2023.⁷ The results show progress in attitude towards gender equality. More than eight in 10 respondents (84%) said that women should have equal rights to land ownership and inheritance more women (87%) than men (81%) support equal land rights. Almost nine in ten citizens (86%) say that women should have the same chance as men to be elected to political office.

Respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree if women have the same rights as men to own and inherit land.

⁷ https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/News-release_More-needs-to-be-done-for-womens-rights-in-Eswatini-Afrobarometer-31Oct23.pdf

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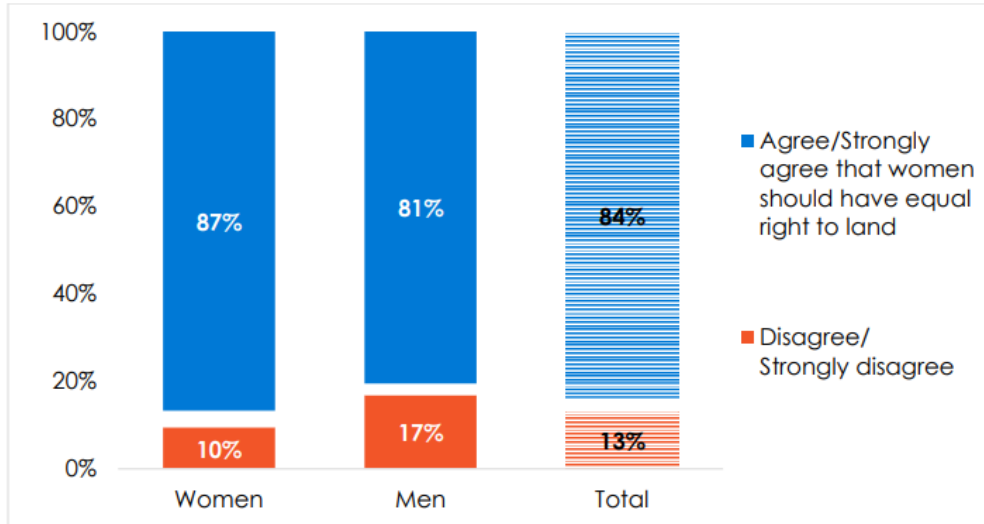


Figure 1: Opinions on women having the same rights as men to own and inherit land. Source: Afrobarometer News Release, 2023

Respondents were also asked if women should an equal chance to be elected

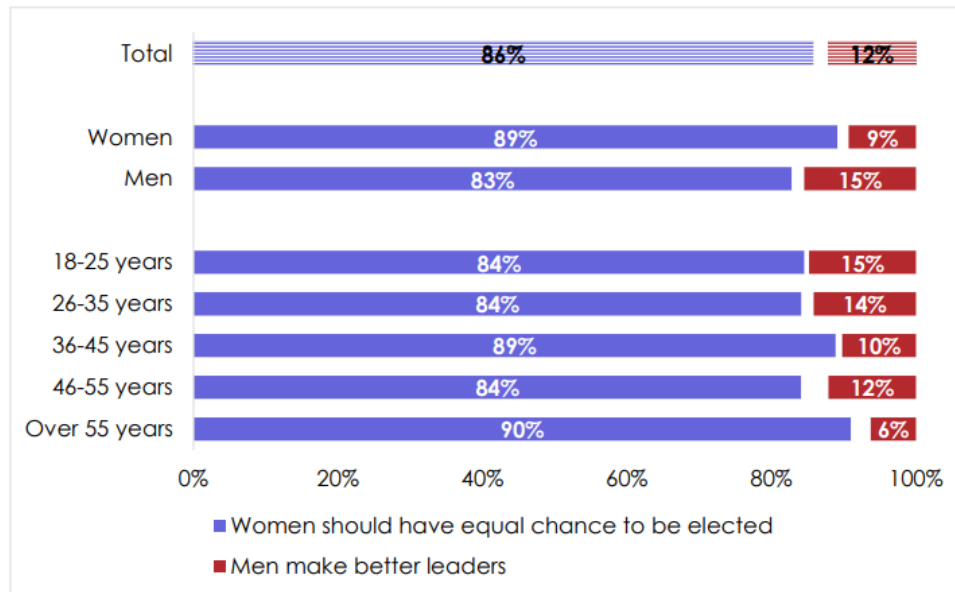


Figure 2: Opinions on women's political participation, by sex and age. Source: Afrobarometer News Release, 2023

2.1.3. Stigma and Discrimination for people of diverse sexualities

Although the rights of the LGBTQI community and not specifically provided for, the Kingdom of Eswatini's Constitution (2005) provides broad protections of rights and freedoms to all and continues to explore effective mechanisms to clarify its position on the LGBTQI+ rights despite the existing normative and religious barriers. Sodomy remains illegal, nevertheless it is noteworthy that no member of the LGBTQI community has been charged under criminal law for the act, nor on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. However, societal attitudes towards the LGBTQI community in the country still remain largely conservative, leading to discrimination and stigma. Despite legal protections for all citizens, there is still progress to be made in terms of social acceptance and equality for LGBTQ individuals in the country. The government has learnt some of the stigma experiences by people of different demographics through the Stigma Index of 2019 and is making necessary measures to address systemic barriers that result in poor access to health services. The Ministry of Health partners with civil society to provide training to health care providers on understanding social diversities and providing client-centered health care service. This training is further extended to the Ministry of Home Affairs for officials facilitating civic registration to ensure an inclusive environment.

Setbacks and Challenges

- Lack of public awareness on the existing constitutional, legal and policy provisions on gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Pervasive patriarchal socio-cultural norms, attitudes and practices perpetuating gender inequality especially in accessing land by women and other core rights.
- There is existence of power imbalance within family structures regarding childbearing and contraceptive usage which exposes women to health risks.
- Unpaid care work is often not regarded as "work" that could be remunerated. The national GDP only captures work that is done for pay in formal market, excluding informal, cross border and unpaid work often performed by women.

1.2.2. Economic structure, participation in productive activities and access to resources

Despite setbacks, Eswatini has shown some economic resilience. According to the Budget Speech (2024), the country is “in better shape” with average GDP growth of 5%, one of the lowest Debt-to-GDP ratios in Africa, at 39%, and a budget deficit of only 2%”, the lowest in the region.⁸ As a middle-income country, Eswatini has a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of US\$3,823 in 2023.⁹ The economy is diversified and largely driven by manufacturing including sugar and textile processing that present 33% of the GDP while mining, forestry and agriculture account for nearly 10%.¹⁰ South Africa remains the main trading partner accounting for 65% of its exports, and 75% of imports. According to the World Bank 2023, the annual average inflation increased from 4.8% in 2022 to 5.0% in 2023, despite easing global inflationary pressures. The increase was as a result of higher prices for transport, food, alcohol, housing and utilities after Covid-19 and the 2021 civil unrest which significantly impacted the economic growth. The pressure continued in early 2024, with inflation increasing from 4.3% in December 2023, to 4.5% in January 2024.

Despite some progress in strengthening the country’s economy through various strategies, the country continues to experience high and persistent poverty. The proportion of the population living below the national poverty line fell moderately from 63% in 2021 to 58.9% in 2017,¹¹ driven by improvements in education levels, the coverage of social protection and labour incomes. Poverty, calculated using the lower-middle income country poverty line, is projected to decline from 52.1% in 2024 to 51.4% in 2025.¹² The Swaziland Household Income and Expenditure Survey (SHIES) Report (2017) showed that 59% of the rural population in Eswatini are poor. There is high household dependence on remittances with 24% of the population relying on remittances as the main source of income.¹³ The study further indicates that half (49.4%) of all households are women-headed. Women in Eswatini participate actively in the labour force, especially in agriculture and the informal sector. In the formal sector, however, achieving gender parity continues to present a challenge, with women typically holding lower paid and less secure

⁸ Parliament of the Kingdom of Eswatini. Budget Speech 2024

⁹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/eswatini/overview>

¹⁰ Eswatini National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2023-2028

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² *ibid*

¹³ State of Financial Inclusion Report (2019)

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jobs compared to men. There has been notable progress in women’s entrepreneurship, with initiatives promoting micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) among women. The revised Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) Policy of 2023 and the Eswatini National Financial Inclusion Strategy (2023-2028) have been adopted to contribute to poverty alleviation by creating and strengthening platforms to serve women and other underserved populations start successful businesses.¹⁴ Eswatini has an estimated 70,000 MSMEs which employ 90,000 people (21% of the workforce) with an estimated contribution of 50% to the GDP. 75% of these MSMEs are informal with a higher percentage owned by women. Nevertheless, access to finance and support services remains a barrier for many women entrepreneurs. The Financial Inclusion Strategy aims to grow adult access from 43% to 75% and reduce those who are excluded from 27% to 15% by 2022. Microfinance initiatives have been introduced to address this gap, these include digital financial solutions such as mobile money and digital cooperatives, but transitioning these promising initiatives to-scale, sustainability and reaching the most rural of women remain challenges. Furthermore, the Citizens’ Economic Empowerment Act of 2023¹, will further enable equal participation of women and men in Eswatini’s economic infrastructure. Customary laws often limit women’s access to land, despite their significant role in agricultural production. Efforts to reform land laws are ongoing but progress has been slow.

The Integrated Labour Force Survey (ILFS; 2021) shows that there are existing gender gaps in overall employment in Eswatini, in most sectors male employment is higher than female employment. However, over half of women are employed in Services and Sales (34.4%) and Elementary occupations (22.8%) such as cleaners and carers, agricultural labourers, manufacturing and transport, food preparation, street vendors etc. than in other areas, as shown in the table below:

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of employed population by occupation and sex. Source: ILFS (2021)

| | Males | Female | Both Sexes |
|---|----------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Employed Population | 118 236 | 123 697 | 241 933 |
| Occupation | % Males | % Female | % Both Sexes |
| Managers | 4.9 | 3.4 | 4.1 |
| Professionals | 10.3 | 12.6 | 11.5 |
| Technicians and Associate Professionals | 6.3 | 4.0 | 5.1 |

¹⁴ Eswatini UPR Report (2021)

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| | | | |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Clerical Support Workers | 3.2 | 5.7 | 4.4 |
| Services and Sales Workers | 18.7 | 34.4 | 26.7 |
| Skilled Agriculture, Forestry Workers | 7.4 | 5.9 | 6.6 |
| Craft and Related Trades Workers | 16.4 | 4.3 | 10.3 |
| Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers | 12.0 | 5.7 | 8.8 |
| Elementary Occupations | 18.2 | 22.8 | 20.6 |
| Armed Forces Occupations | 1.1 | 0.3 | 0.7 |
| Not elsewhere classified | 1.4 | 0.9 | 1.1 |
| All Occupations | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

1.2.3. Economic Empowerment

Gender equality has been identified as a key accelerator for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development including Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has a dedicated goal of achieving gender equality and empowering all women (SDG 5). Eswatini’s recent efforts towards this goal include initiatives to support women entrepreneurs and improve access to financial resources. Though still operating at a small scale, the establishment of the Women’s Enterprise Fund has provided funding and support for women-owned businesses, fostering economic independence and growth.¹⁵ The Women Business Start-up Microfinance Revolving Fund was launched in 2023 to provide financial support to women entrepreneurs in Eswatini. This initiative, backed by a commitment of approximately SZL19 million (USD\$1 million) from the Republic of China (Taiwan), was established with the aim to empower women at the grassroots level by offering affordable loans to start and grow their businesses.¹⁶ Similarly, Businesswomen Eswatini, a wing of Business Eswatini, Eswatini’s Chamber of Commerce, was created in 2019 to uplift and empower women entrepreneurs.¹⁷ It facilitates and advocates for an enabling environment for sustainable entrepreneurship of women in Eswatini through the coordination of capacity building programs, dissemination of business-related information and provision of mentor programs for existing and aspiring businesswomen.¹⁸

¹⁵ Eswatini Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Trade, 2022

¹⁶ Times of Eswatini, 7 September 2023

¹⁷ Business Eswatini, 2019

¹⁸ *ibid*

To advance the empowerment of women through mainstreaming in energy sector, The DPMO, in partnership with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy, convened an international discussion to mobilize support for Eswatini women in the energy sector.¹⁹ The official side event was held on the margins of the 68th session on the Commission of the Status of Women (CSW) in New York, USA on 21st March 2024. It was themed “Accelerating gender equality and women’s economic empowerment through clean energy investment”.²⁰ The side event also showcased best-practice initiatives implemented by the government in partnership with the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme to improve the participation of women in the energy sector. Towards a similar end, Eswatini, in collaboration with international organizations including COMESA, has hosted several workshops aimed at promoting gender equality and expanding career opportunities for women in the country and the region.²¹ The workshops focused on several key areas, including the need to transform the sector’s corporate culture to be more inclusive and appealing to female talent.²² The commitment displayed at the workshops reflects a growing recognition of the importance of diversity and gender equality in driving the industry forward. This signifies the call for more women to join the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields through educational incentives and challenging barriers to employment in related industries which have historically been male dominated.

Setbacks and Challenges in Economic Empowerment

- Economic disparities between men and women persist, with women often concentrated in low-paying, informal sector jobs. The Women’s Enterprise Fund has made some progress in supporting women entrepreneurs, but access to finance remains limited for many women, particularly in rural areas. Structural barriers such as discriminatory lending practices and lack of collateral continue to restrict women’s economic opportunities (Eswatini Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Trade, 2022).
- A lot of women in the informal sector operate micro and small-scale businesses and lack capacity for growth and access to finance. Access to credit is a challenge for most women due to lack of security required by financial institutions.

¹⁹ United Nations Development Programme-Eswatini, 2024

²⁰ United Nations Development Programme-Eswatini, 2024

²¹ Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, 2024

²² Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, 2024

1.2.4. Legislative and Policy Reforms

Since the last BPfA Progress Report (2019), Eswatini has made significant strides in enacting and enforcing legislation aimed at protecting women's rights and promoting gender equality. The enactment of the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act (2018) and the development its associated Regulations in 2020 are notable examples, providing a robust legal framework to combat violence against women and ensure justice for survivors.²³ The landmark Eswatini High Court ruling in August 2019 that the common-law doctrine of marital power is unconstitutional added to existing reforms to end discrimination against women and uphold their constitutional rights to equality.²⁴ The court also struck down sections of the Marriage Act of 1964 that subjected women in Eswatini to customary marital power, perpetuating the violation of their rights contrary to constitutional provision.²⁵ In 2023, the National Gender Policy was launched, and it aims to promote gender equality, women's empowerment, reduce gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices in all spheres of life, including health, education, employment, agriculture and politics.²⁶ Other thematic areas in the policy are family and socialisation, which underscores the necessity of socialisation in changing and shaping attitudes towards women in Eswatini. Similarly, the National Strategy on Ending Violence (2023-2027) provides the country's framework for ending violence. Civil society and the United Nations family, including UNDP, UNICEF, and UNFPA, have played crucial roles in advocating for, developing and supporting the implementation of these legislative and policy reforms.²⁷

²³ Eswatini Government, 2018

²⁴ Human Rights Watch, 2020

²⁵ Human Rights Watch, 2020

²⁶ National Gender Policy, 2023

²⁷ UNDP, 2021, UNICEF, 2021 and UNFPA, 2021

Setbacks and Challenges in Legal and Policy Gaps

- While Eswatini has enacted several important pieces of legislation, enforcement remains a significant challenge. The Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act (2018) is a notable legislative achievement; however, gaps in its implementation have limited its effectiveness. Many women are still unaware of their rights under this law, and the judicial system faces challenges in handling cases of gender-based violence effectively (Eswatini Government, 2018). Additionally, there is a lack of comprehensive gender-sensitive policies that address the multifaceted nature of gender inequality.

1.2.5. Legal Clinics and Human Rights Mechanisms

The establishment of the semi-autonomous Legal Aid Unit in 2023 under the Ministry of Justice is a milestone in ensuring that women access justice. The Legal Aid Unit is responsible for the coordination and provision of legal aid services in the country.²⁸ With legal services often being prohibitively expensive, access to legal aid becomes essential for ensuring fair and equitable justice. The Legal Aid Unit provides support to citizens by providing legal representation, legal education, alternative disputes resolution and advice, legal aid empowers individuals to navigate the complex legal system, safeguards their rights, and promotes their active participation in society.²⁹ Essentially, legal aid has opened doors to justice for those who cannot afford the services of a lawyer, including women who sometimes suffer injustice due to lack of legal fees, or disparities in spending power.³⁰ An increase in senior female Judges serving in the Judiciary, including in positions of Supreme Court Judge, High Court Judge, Acting Director of Public Prosecutions, and the Registrar of the High Court also shows progress in ensuring that women have access to justice. This is in line with the new joint UNWOMEN and UNDP research, which concludes that having more women judges on the bench reflects the true diversity of society and brings equality and fairness to the justice system.³¹ The presence of women not only increases trust in the judiciary and improves justice experience for women and groups most at risk of being left

²⁸ United Nations Development Programme- Eswatini, 2023

³¹ United Nations Development Programme, 2023

behind, but it also inspires the next generation of women and creates more opportunities for other women in the sector.³²

1.2.6. Education and Training

Eswatini has prioritized the education of girls and women, resulting in increased enrolment rates and improved educational outcomes. Programs aimed at keeping girls in school have contributed to a reduction in dropout rates and have empowered young women through education and skills training.³³ Improving the quality of education remains a priority for Eswatini. The government has invested in teacher training and professional development programs to enhance the skills and competencies of educators. According to the Ministry of Education and Training (2022),³⁴ there has been an increase in the number of teachers receiving in-service training, focusing on modern pedagogical techniques and inclusive education practices. Efforts to improve school infrastructure, such as building new classrooms and upgrading existing facilities, have been ongoing. These improvements aim to create a conducive learning environment for all students.

Through the Deputy Prime Minister's Office, all orphan and vulnerable children can acquire secondary education through the Orphan and Vulnerable Children grant which now covers majority of the school fees, as announced by the Deputy Prime Minister Hon. Thuli Dladla this year (2024). This ensures that young girls can acquire an education, as Yan (2019) reports that while 97% of girls enrol at some point into primary school, only 37.7% of them continue into secondary education. This can be attributed to the fact that free education is only offered at primary-school level and many may not afford to pay school fees for secondary school if they do not qualify for the OVC grants.

³² United Nations Development Programme, 2023

³³ UNICEF, 2021

³⁴ Ministry of Education and Training. (2022). Annual Education Sector Performance Report. Government of Eswatini.

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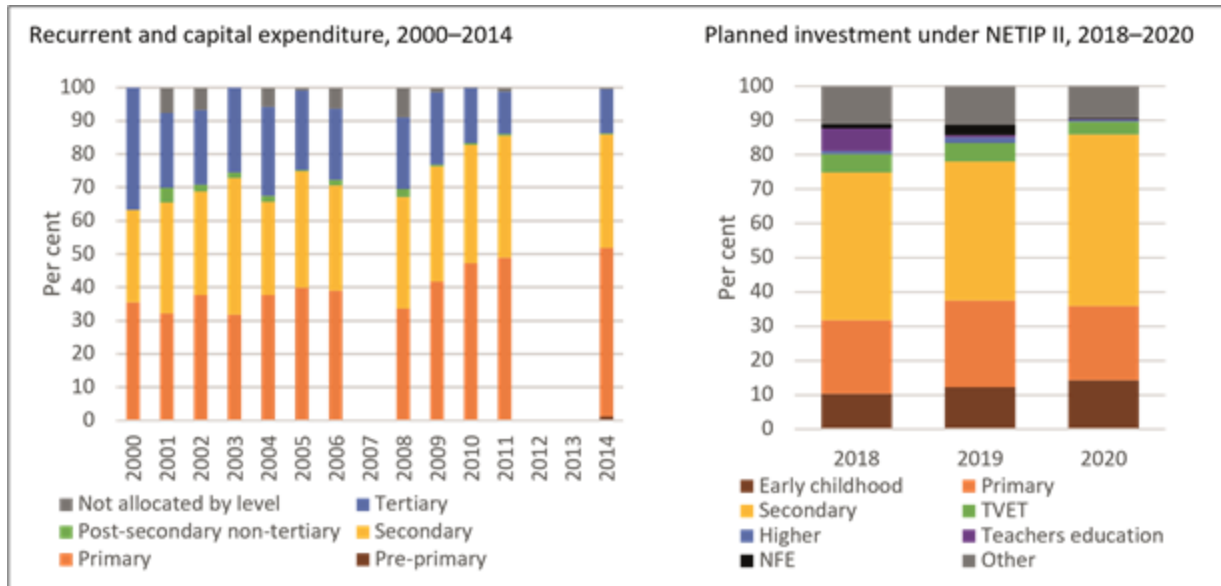


Figure 3: Distribution of Government Expenditure on Education by levels. Source: Eswatini TVET Policy Review, 2020

Studies show that female learners regularly miss school lessons during their menstrual cycles due to lacking menstrual health products. Globally, the challenge of menstrual hygiene management affects millions of girls, but it is especially pronounced in low- and middle-income countries. Hennegan et al. (2016)³⁵ conducted a cross-sectional study in Uganda (although easily applied to an Eswatini context) which found that the absence of adequate menstrual hygiene resources significantly contributes to high rates of school absenteeism among adolescent girls. The study emphasizes that without access to sanitary pads, girls often stay home during their periods to avoid embarrassment and discomfort, which cumulatively impacts their academic performance and future opportunities. Similar findings are reported by Oster and Thornton (2011)³⁶ in Kenya, where the provision of sanitary pads led to a marked improvement in school attendance, indicating that access to menstrual products is a crucial determinant of girls' educational participation.

³⁵ Hennegan, J., Shannon, A. K., Rubli, J., Schwab, K. J., & Melendez-Torres, G. J. (2016). Menstrual hygiene management and school absenteeism among adolescent girls in Uganda: a cross-sectional study. *BMJ Open*, 6(12), e012596. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2016-012596>

³⁶ Oster, E., & Thornton, R. (2011). Sanitary pads, school attendance and women's empowerment: Evidence from a randomized controlled trial in Kenya. *Journal of Development Economics*, 104, 61-73. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2013.12.003>

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In Eswatini, the situation is similar. A UNICEF (2020)³⁷ report highlights that poverty exacerbates the lack of access to sanitary pads, resulting in many girls missing several days of school each month. The report underscores that the inability to manage menstrual hygiene effectively not only affects attendance but also has broader implications for girl's psychological well-being and confidence. Furthermore, a study by UNICEF (2021)³⁸ on menstrual hygiene management in Eswatini schools revealed that providing adequate sanitary products and education about menstrual health can significantly reduce absenteeism and improve academic outcomes for girls. This study stresses the need for a comprehensive approach that includes both the provision of sanitary products and the establishment of supportive school environments.

The country, with the assistance of civil society organizations and in-kind donations from the corporate sector, is making all efforts to provide sanitary pads to female learners. However, the general coverage for the provision of sanitary health is currently very low due to financial constraints and competing development priorities. To improve access to education, the country introduced Free Primary Education (FPE) after the enactment of the Free Primary Education Act of 2010. Section 10 subsection 1 of that legislation compels parents to send children to primary school for free.³⁹ After the introduction of this programme, grade 1 enrolment has improved. To further strengthen this effort, the government introduced temporary Personal Identity Numbers for children, which has improved the enrolment rate and the government is in a process to conduct a nationwide “Mop-Up Campaign” to register all children without birth certificates in the country. The government further provides free textbooks, stationery, school furniture and feeding scheme programmes to all public schools to retain children in schools.

The government is currently working on developing a learner pregnancy prevention support guideline. The policy will pronounce that no learner should be excluded from education due to pregnancy and will align with the National Education and Training Sector Policy (2018) and recent instructions made by the Minister of Education and Training to school principals. The Ministry of

³⁷ UNICEF Eswatini. (2020). Menstrual Health in Eswatini. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/eswatini/reports/menstrual-health-eswatini>

³⁸ UNICEF. (2021). Menstrual Hygiene Management in Eswatini Schools: A Study Report. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/eswatini/reports/menstrual-hygiene-management-eswatini-schools>

³⁹ www.gov.sz

Education and Training partners with civil society organizations (CSOs) in supporting pregnant learners to be reintegrated back into the education system. According to the 2021 Integrated Biological-Behavioural Surveillance Survey (IBBSS), out-of-school youth aged 15-19 years reported to be more sexually active in the last 12 months of the survey than in-school youth of the same age (33.2% and 15.7%, respectively), further indicating the role that education plays in HIV and pregnancy prevention.

1.2.6.1. Literacy Levels

Eswatini's literacy rate is comparatively high, at up to 96% of the general population. However, the country has not reached gender parity in literacy with females having slightly lower rates, at 95.6%, when compared to men, 96.5% of whom are literate.⁴⁰ Literacy is higher among adolescent females, at 93.1%, compared to 89% among males of the same age group,⁴¹ which, when supported by exam pass rates, indicates that when a girl is permitted and empowered to remain in education, she succeeds on-average more often than a boy classmate. Literacy levels for girls have shown significant improvement over the years due to various educational reforms and initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in education. According to UNESCO (2020), the literacy rate for females aged 15 and above in Eswatini is approximately 90.8%, indicating substantial progress. However, disparities still exist, particularly between rural and urban areas, where access to education can be limited. According to the UNICEF Education Sector Analysis (2023),⁴² the literacy rates in Eswatini show a narrowing gender gap. The literacy rate for men aged 15 and above is approximately 87.6%, while for girls in the same age group, it is slightly higher at 90.3%.⁴³ These figures indicate that while both genders have high literacy rates, girls have a marginally higher literacy rate compared to boys.

The Eswatini National Education and Training Sector Policy (2018) highlights efforts to ensure that all children, including girls, have access to quality education. This policy aims to address barriers such as early marriage, gender-based violence, and socio-economic challenges that

⁴⁰ Eswatini Common Core

⁴¹ *ibid*

⁴² UNICEF. (2023). Eswatini Education Sector Analysis. United Nations Children's Fund.

⁴³ UNICEF, 2023

disproportionately affect girls' education. Moreover, initiatives by organizations like UNICEF and the Ministry of Education and Training have been pivotal in promoting girls' education. For example, the provision of scholarships, mentorship programs, and community awareness campaigns have contributed to higher retention and completion rates for girls in schools.⁴⁴

Table 4: Literacy rate by sex over two censuses. Source: Eswatini Common Core Data 2022

| Year | Total (%) | Male (%) | Female (%) |
|------|-----------|----------|------------|
| 2007 | 89.1 | 90.2 | 88.3 |
| 2017 | 96.0 | 96.5 | 95.6 |

1.2.6.2. Enrolment rates

According to UNICEF (2023), the gender parity index for primary and secondary education has improved, indicating a more balanced enrolment of boys and girls in schools. Specific programs targeting the retention of girls in schools, particularly during secondary education, have been enhanced. These programs address challenges such as early marriages, teenage pregnancies, and gender-based violence, which traditionally hinder girls' education. Various studies have noted that despite high enrolment rates, girls in rural areas face significant challenges that impact their educational attainment. These challenges include long distances to schools, lack of sanitary facilities, and cultural practices that prioritize boys' education over girls.

At primary school level, the country has achieved gender parity in terms of net enrolment at 89% for both girls and boys because of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2010. The gross enrolment rate (GER) for primary school rose from 126% in 2009 to 132% in 2010 after the introduction of the FPE.⁴⁵ There is also gender parity regarding the proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach the last grade of primary school, at 93% for both girls and boys. There is a 9-percentage gap in favour of girls in terms of net secondary school enrolment, with girls having a net enrolment of 55% compared to 45% for boys, although both male and female secondary school enrolment rates are too low to be developing the future human capital Eswatini requires.

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ World Bank Eswatini Education Sector Analysis 2021

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Net enrolment in lower-secondary school is 32.3% (26% of males and 38.7% of females in 2017).⁴⁶ However, lower secondary school dropout rates of both girls and, to-a-lesser-extent, boys, remains high. Eighteen percent (18%) of girls drop out of primary school and 35% of girls drop out of junior secondary school at some point with rural and poor girls being at much greater risk. At any time, a total of 11.6% of female adolescents of secondary-school age are currently out-of-school, compared with 7.4% of male adolescents of the same age.⁴⁷ It is widely felt that there are more AGYW dropping out of lower and upper secondary school due to a variety of social factors including teenage pregnancy, intergenerational relationships and the demands of unpaid care work. The share of female students enrolled in universities has also been encouraging, at >50% since 2012 and reaching a peak of 54% in 2016 and 2017.⁴⁸ Figure 4 below shows the gross enrolment rates by education level between 2009 and 2018.

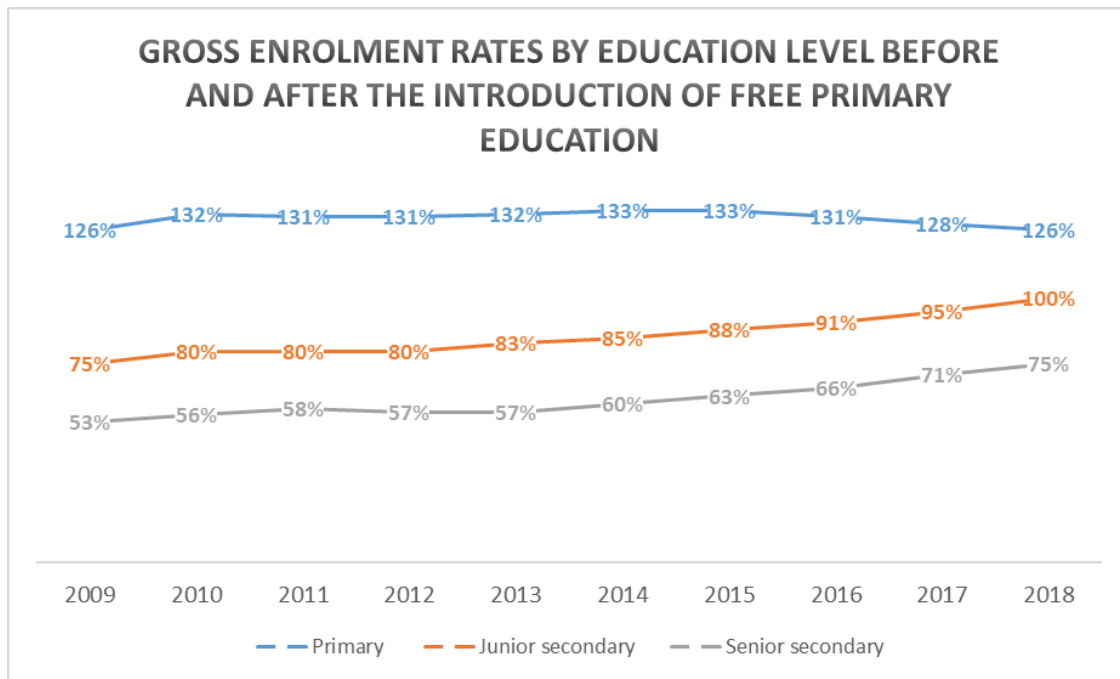


Figure 4: Gross enrolment rates by education level, 2009-2018. Source: Education Sector Analysis Report, 2021

The figure below disaggregates this data by sex, focussing on 2018 only:

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.4

⁴⁷ UNICEF Country Program Document, 2021, pg. 4

⁴⁸ Gender Assessment of Eswatini National HIV Response 2024

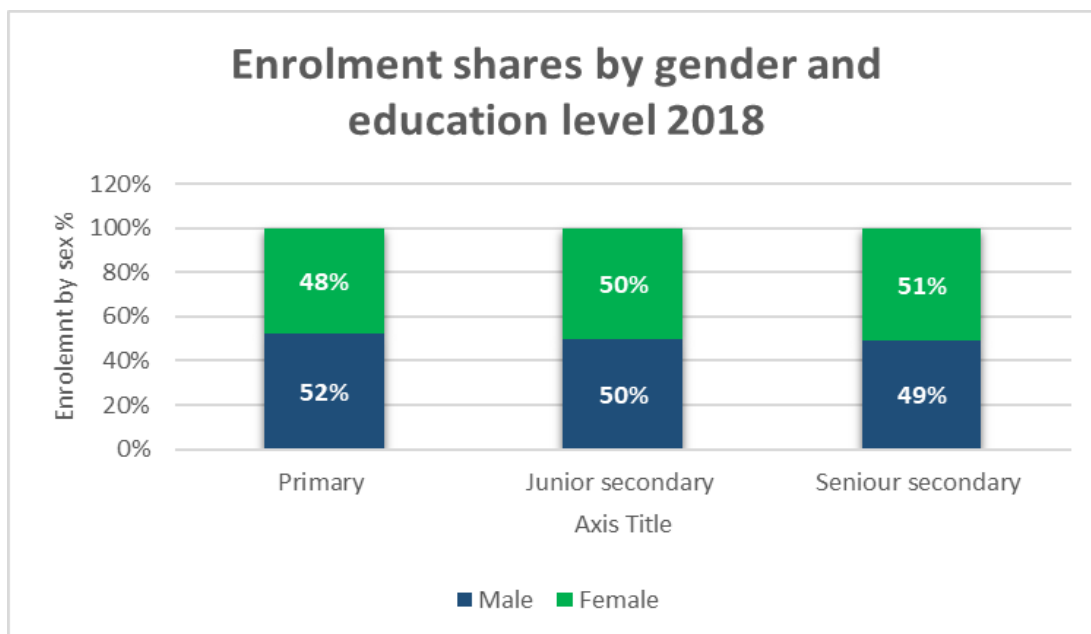


Figure 5: Enrolment rates by education level and gender, 2018. Source: Education Sector Analysis Report, 2021

Overall, access to TVET is increasing with new institutions being added and others in the pipeline to be opened soon. In 2019, the MoET had recorded 34 TVET institutions, five of which are public. There are additional public institutions run by other line ministries, and a significant number of private institutions, which may be registered as organizations but not formally accredited as training institutions. Students can also access public non-formal vocational training through the MoET’s Rural Education and Skills Centres (RECs) and the Sebenta National Institute (SNI) which is managed by the Adult and Non-Formal Education Program of the MoET. These non-formal vocational training programs offer short courses such as carpentry, sewing, catering, and computing. While these courses were originally targeted to those who had completed adult education programs, students from the general education with an interest in these courses are also accepted into the programs.

Table 5: Distribution of TVET Providers in Eswatini. Source: TVET Policy Review, 2020

| Type of Institution | Region | | | | |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| | Hhohho | Lubombo | Manzini | Shiselweni | Total |
| Public | 8 | 6 | 9 | 4 | 27 |
| Private | 12 | 1 | 13 | 3 | 29 |
| Not-for-profit | 4 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 14 |
| Total | 24 | 10 | 27 | 9 | 70 |

Altogether, these institutions enrolled a total of 6,881 trainees (56 percent of whom were female) in 2013. Given the youth population (aged 15–24) of roughly 314,000 and secondary school enrolment of roughly 90,000 (including about one-third enrolled in senior secondary schools), this is far from sufficient. ⁴⁹An earlier report estimated the potentially unmet demand for TVET at 14,000 individuals each year, including 7,500 students who terminated their studies after Grade 7, Form 3 or Form 5, and 6,500 students dropping out of secondary education. ⁵⁰

Access for TVET is limited for women and persons with special education needs. In conducting the TVET policy review in 2020, UNESCO stated that at Gwamile VOCTIM, for instance, very few females are enrolled in electrical engineering, woodwork or automotive training, females are more in the Commercials. The following table shows Gwamile Victim enrolment between 2016 and 2017:

Table 6: Enrolment at Gwamile VOCTIM by sex 2016 and 2017. Source: TVET Policy review 2020

| Year | 2016 | | | 2017 | | |
|---------------------------|----------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| | Females | Males | Total | Female | Males | Total |
| Automotive | 1 | 48 | 49 | 4 | 45 | 49 |
| Building and construction | 2 | 19 | 21 | 2 | 19 | 21 |
| Electrical | 2 | 24 | 26 | 2 | 24 | 26 |
| Mechanical engineering | 2 | 24 | 26 | 2 | 24 | 26 |
| Woodwork | 1 | 10 | 11 | 1 | 10 | 11 |
| Total | 7 | 118 | 125 | 11 | 135 | 146 |

1.2.6.3. Barriers to completion of basic education

Several impediments hinder girls from completing basic education in Eswatini. These barriers are often interrelated and can vary by location or region, socioeconomic status, and other factors. The following are some of the primary barriers:

⁴⁹ World Bank, 2014b

⁵⁰ World Bank, 2010

Early Pregnancy and School Dropout Rates

One of the critical barriers to completing basic education for girls in Eswatini is early pregnancy. According to recent data, 18% of girls drop out of primary school and 35% of girls drop out of junior secondary school due to pregnancy.⁵¹ This high dropout rate significantly impacts their educational attainment and future opportunities, thus may have a bearing on their development in all other aspects of their future.

Socio-Economic Challenges

Girls from rural and poor backgrounds are at a much higher risk of dropping out of school. These socio-economic challenges limit their access to education and increase their vulnerability to early pregnancies and other adverse outcomes. Addressing these socio-economic disparities is crucial to ensuring that all girls have equal access to education.⁵²

Empowerment and Health Issues

Empowerment of girls and women is essential for accelerating the demographic transition and reducing the prevalence of HIV. The prevalence of HIV is almost twice as high among young women as among young men in Eswatini.⁵³ This disparity underscores the need for targeted interventions to empower girls and young women, improve their access to reproductive health services, and educate them on HIV prevention.

Influence of Older Sexual Partners

Female youth, both in and out of school, often have sexual partners who are older than them. This age disparity makes it difficult for young women to negotiate contraceptive use, leading to higher rates of unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Comprehensive sex education and empowerment programs are necessary to equip young women with the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.

⁵¹ Government of Eswatini. (2019). Eswatini Education Sector Analysis. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

⁵² Ministry of Education and Training, Eswatini. (2021). Impact of Socio-Economic Factors on Girls' Education in Eswatini. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.sz/index.php/education-and-training>

⁵³ Government of Eswatini, 2019

1.2.6.4. Water, sanitation and hygiene (Wash) in schools

In Eswatini, the situation of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) in schools has been a critical issue impacting the overall health, well-being, and educational outcomes of students, particularly girls. Between 2019 and 2024, significant strides have been made, but numerous challenges persist. The country has increased access to safe water at a national level from 67%⁵⁴ to 77% in 2022.⁵⁵ About 72% of the rural population has access to improved water sources, compared to 95% for urban areas. As stated in MICS 2022, almost 8 to 10 households use drinking water from improved sources that are accessible within 30 minutes. This has resulted in improved access to sanitation services for 58% overall, which is 49% for urban areas and 61% rural areas.⁵⁶ Some of the water supply initiatives Eswatini has initiated through the support of Development Partners to improve water and sanitation, especially in rural areas.

A significant portion of schools in Eswatini still lack adequate WASH facilities, which disproportionately affects girls. The Eswatini Education and Training Sector Policy (2018) indicated that approximately 60% of schools did not have access to safe drinking water, and nearly 50% lacked adequate sanitation facilities. This inadequacy often leads to increased absenteeism among girls, particularly during menstruation. A study by UNICEF (2021) found that 70% of girls missed school during their menstrual periods due to the lack of private and hygienic sanitation facilities. The stigma and taboos surrounding menstruation exacerbate the situation.⁵⁷ Many girls do not have access to menstrual hygiene products, and there is limited menstrual health education. The lack of appropriate facilities and materials forces girls to stay home during their periods, significantly impacting their academic performance and contributing to higher dropout rates.

Despite these challenges, there have been notable successes in improving WASH facilities in schools. The Ministry of Education and Training, in collaboration with UNICEF and other partners, has implemented various programs to enhance WASH infrastructure. By 2023, over 200 schools had been provided with improved sanitation facilities and access to clean water through

⁵⁴ EHIES 2017

⁵⁵ MICS 2022

⁵⁶ All MICS 2022

⁵⁷ UNICEF. (2021). Menstrual Hygiene Management in Eswatini Schools: A Study Report. UNICEF Eswatini.

the School WASH Improvement Project (SWIP).⁵⁸ This project focused on constructing gender-segregated toilets, handwashing stations, and providing menstrual hygiene management education and supplies.

The involvement of the community and schools in maintaining these facilities has been a key success factor. Schools have formed WASH committees, which include students, to ensure the proper use and maintenance of the facilities. These committees have also played a crucial role in promoting hygiene education, leading to improved health outcomes among students. The Eswatini government, recognizing the critical impact of WASH on education, particularly for girls, has undertaken several initiatives to address these issues. The National Development Plan (2019-2023)⁵⁹ prioritized WASH in schools, allocating substantial funds for the construction and rehabilitation of water and sanitation infrastructure.

In 2020, the Ministry of Health launched the National Menstrual Health Management Strategy, which aims to break the stigma surrounding menstruation and ensure that all girls have access to menstrual hygiene products and education. This strategy has been instrumental in reducing absenteeism among girls and improving their academic performance.

Moreover, the government has partnered with international organizations such as UNICEF, World Bank, and WHO to enhance WASH facilities in schools. These partnerships have provided technical and financial support for various projects, including the installation of rainwater harvesting systems and the construction of environmentally friendly sanitation facilities. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the importance of WASH in schools, leading to increased investments in hygiene facilities to ensure the safety and health of students. The government's swift response in providing handwashing stations and sanitation supplies to schools during the pandemic has set a precedent for ongoing improvements in WASH infrastructure.

Table 7: The number of beneficiaries and budgets of various water and sanitation projects. Source: CESSR Final Report, 2024

| Project | No. of Beneficiaries | Budget |
|---|----------------------|-----------------|
| Integrated Water Supply and Sanitation (Manzini Region) | 76000 | SZL 825 million |

⁵⁸ UNICEF. (2023). School WASH Improvement Project (SWIP): Progress Report. UNICEF Eswatini.

⁵⁹ National Development Plan 2019-2023. (2019). Government of Eswatini.

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| | | |
|--|--------|-----------------|
| Revival of 3 water projects for 3 rural areas (Lubombo Region) | 3969 | SZL 1.3 million |
| Solar water project (Manzini Region) | 33,243 | SZL 27 million |
| Solar water project | 4,800 | SZL 8.4 million |

Through Eswatini Water Service Corporation, the country has set up affordable water kiosks for customers to enjoy the usage of clean water without the minimum charges on what the household can afford to buy as and when necessary. The tariff for the kiosk is E7.45 per KL (1000 litres) flat rate. A total of 44 kiosks have been installed in the country.

The country is committed to continue improving water, sanitation and hygiene in schools and communities, ultimately leading to better health outcomes for all individuals as the quality of the school environment plays a vital role in determining the quality of education. These efforts will contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals related to clean water and sanitation. As outlined in the National Development Plan, the government is committed to investing in infrastructure and resources to ensure access to clean water and sanitation facilities.

Setbacks and Challenges in Education

- Although enrolment rates for girls have improved, there are still significant gaps in retention and completion rates, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels. Socio-cultural factors, such as early marriage and teenage pregnancy, contribute to high dropout rates among girls. Additionally, gender biases in school curricula and teaching practices perpetuate stereotypes and limit girls' aspirations (UNICEF, 2021).
- The life skills programme is not offered uniformly across all schools.

1.2.7. Health including sexual reproductive health (SRH) and rights

Eswatini has improved women's access to healthcare services, particularly in the area of reproductive health. About 85% of health facilities in Eswatini are within the WHO-required 8km radius. The Government's main mandate is to ensure that it provides preventative, curative, and rehabilitative interventions. Cost implications are free for all primary health services (preventative) and are offered in all clinic-level facilities. From 2018 to 2023, the Government constructed and rehabilitated 17 hospitals and clinics with an investment of E441 million and further a total of 25 health facilities were revamped to be COVID 19 compliant.

The implementation of the National Health Sector Strategic Plan has enhanced the availability and quality of maternal and child health services, contributing to better health outcomes for women and children.⁶⁰ Though there are acute challenges within the Health Service sector, the government with assistance from its development partners and NGOs have made available the Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) which is a form of HIV prevention. The PrEP together with the PEP Ring for women are a milestone in the prevention of HIV on the part of women, this is because some women in Eswatini do not have the ability to initiate safe sex.

The current fertility rate for Eswatini in 2023 is 2.803 births per woman. In the 1990s, women were having at least four children within their lifetime. However, trends show a decline to less than 3 children per woman in 2023. The fertility rate amongst adolescents has decreased since 2010, from 83 of every 1,000 girls aged 15 to 19 giving birth, to 71 per 1,000 in 2020.⁶¹ While the fertility rate has been declining in Eswatini,

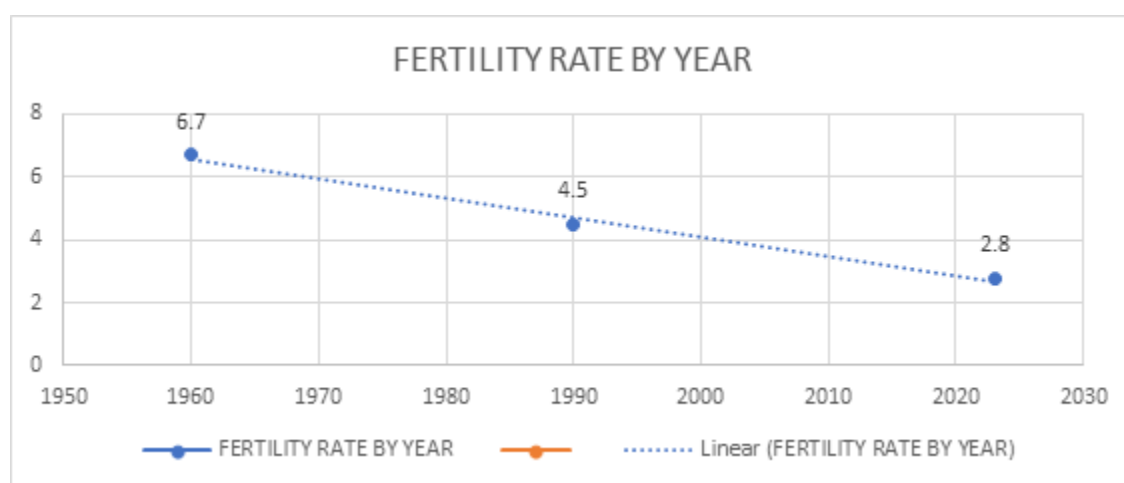


Figure 6 Table 8: Eswatini's Fertility rate by year, 1960-2023. Source: World Bank Meta Data

1.2.7.1. Maternal Mortality

Despite the high maternal mortality (452/100,000 population), it has had accessibility to health services for pregnant women (about 98% ANC coverage) since early 2,000, institutional delivery at 93%, and high skill birth attendance of about 94.3% (MICS 2022 and Population Census 2017). Strides have also been made to reduce both maternal and child mortality from 589/100,000 in

⁶⁰ Ministry of Health, 2020

⁶¹ The World Bank Meta Data

2006/07 to 452/100,000 in 2017, whilst child mortality has declined from 27 to 18/1,000 live births (Population and Housing Census 2017).

While Eswatini’s maternal mortality ratio remains comparatively high the percentage of maternal deaths related to HIV has fallen dramatically, from as high as 3-in-4 (75%) in 2008, to 8.6% in 2020, indicating the success of widespread outpatient HTS and PMTCT initiatives. For instance, in 2020, 94% of pregnant young women received HIV testing at their first ANC appointment, an increase of 24% from the 70% reported in 2015.⁶²

Mortality and fertility assumptions for the low, medium and high variant National projections, 2017 – 2038

The Eswatini Population Projection Report 2017-2038 indicates that female life expectancy at birth in Eswatini was 63.5 years in 2017, a great increase from 43.1 years according to the 2007 Census results.⁶³ The increase in life expectancy at birth is attributed to the availability and utilization of antiretroviral by in HIV and AIDS management and other advances in healthcare systems in the country.

Table 9: Life expectancy and fertility rate forecast, 2017-2038. Source: Eswatini Population Projection Report 2017-2038

| Year | Expectation of life at Birth | | Total Fertility Rate | | |
|------|------------------------------|--------|----------------------|--------|------|
| | Male | Female | Low | Medium | High |
| 2017 | 58.9 | 63.5 | 3.23 | 3.23 | 3.23 |
| 2020 | 60.9 | 65.5 | 2.90 | 3.00 | 3.10 |
| 2025 | 62.9 | 67.5 | 2.70 | 2.70 | 3.10 |
| 2030 | 64.9 | 69.0 | 2.50 | 2.60 | 3.00 |
| 2035 | 66.8 | 70.5 | 2.38 | 2.51 | 2.90 |
| 2038 | 66.8 | 70.5 | 2.10 | 2.50 | 2.90 |

According to the National SRH Policy 2013,⁶⁴ Eswatini has been successful in developing a functional SRH programme through:

- i. Integration of SRH and HIV services in Public Health Centre services
- ii. A dedicated RH commodities budget line

⁶² UNICEF, Situation Analysis of SRH Report, 2022

⁶³ UNFPA_ Eswatini Population Projection Report 2017-2038

⁶⁴ National Policy on Sexual Reproductive Health 2013

- iii. Development of the Integrated Sexual and Reproductive Strategic Plan (2008-2015)
- iv. Introduction of Confidential Enquiry into Maternal Deaths (CEMD)
- v. Inclusion of sexual health education in schools in the Education Policy (2010)
- vi. Existence of a Gender policy (2023) which calls for redressing support for gender-based violence for survivors
- vii. SRH service delivery guidelines in place (Family planning, PMTCT, cervical cancer and obstetric guidelines)
- viii. 94% women accessed ANC services and 74.1% delivered in health facility (CSO 2007)

1.2.7.2. The COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching and long-lasting effects worldwide, including in Eswatini. The emergence of COVID-19 threatened the country's economy, health and life for many people including especially women and further exacerbated existing gender inequalities in Eswatini, highlighting the vulnerabilities and challenges faced by women in various spheres of life.

A larger percentage of women in Eswatini work in the informal sector, which was severely affected by lockdowns and restrictions. The closure of markets and limitations on movement disrupted their ability to earn income, exacerbating economic insecurity. Women in formal employment also faced job losses and reduced working hours as businesses scaled down operations in response to the pandemic. This affected their financial stability and ability to support themselves and their families. With schools and day-care facilities closed, women took on additional caregiving responsibilities at home. This strain was particularly challenging for working mothers, impacting their ability to participate in the workforce or pursue economic activities. According to UN Women's COVID-19 Rapid Gender Assessment (2021), women (70%) were more likely than men (67%) to indicate that their mental and emotional health was negatively affected by the pandemic. Women and men were nearly equally likely to worry about financial problems (67%) and about contracting COVID-19 (44%). However, women were more likely than men to be concerned about access to food (43% for women and 38% for men) as well as death (38% and 35% respectively).⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Ibid.

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The government of Eswatini implemented various strategies to mitigate the impact of the pandemic, including social assistance programs and food distribution conducted by government agencies and civil society organizations. However, the effectiveness of these measures did not reach all vulnerable women.

The following table shows Eswatini’s COVID-19 Cases by May 2024

Table 10: Eswatini’s COVID 19 data. Source: Eswatini COVID-19 Weekly SITREP WK 18 2024.

| Summary of COVID-19 Cases in Eswatini as of Week 18 (28 th April - 04 th May) 2024 | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Region | Week 18 New cases | Cumulative confirmed cases | Week 18 New deaths | Cumulative deaths | Case fatality rate (%) |
| Hhohho | 01 | 24 939 | 00 | 432 | 1.7 |
| Manzini | 01 | 26 415 | 00 | 547 | 2.1 |
| Lubombo | 00 | 14 001 | 00 | 169 | 1.2 |
| Shiselweni | 01 | 9 985 | 00 | 279 | 2.8 |
| National | 03 | 75 340 | 00 | 1427 | 1.9 |

1.2.7.3. Contraceptive Prevalence Rate

The contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) increased from 51% in 2007 to 66.1% in 2014.⁶⁶ Although self-reported, the CPR has surpassed the National Population Policy target of 65% by 2022.⁶⁷ Unmet need for family planning stands at 15.2% among women aged 15-49,⁶⁸ and is higher (28.6%) among adolescents and highest among the poorest, most-rural and least educated young women.⁶⁹ The most popular method of contraception is the male condom (23.9%), followed by injectable (2.9%).⁷⁰

The termination pregnancy (abortion) remains illegal in Eswatini unless it is as a result of rape, incest or the life of the mother is endangered. Even as when a case meets one of these criteria, clinical termination is difficult to access. This results in unsafe and unlicensed abortions in the so-

⁶⁶ CSO and UNICEF, 2015

⁶⁷ National Population Unit, 2002

⁶⁸ Swaziland Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)

⁶⁹ Dlamini N. The Implication of Teenage Pregnancies in Eswatini: A Trend and Spatial Analysis, Eswatini Economic Policy Analysis and Research Centre (ESEPARC) Working Paper 012/SZL, 2019

⁷⁰ Ibid

called “backstreet” termination. According to the Ministry of Health (2023),⁷¹ the prevalence of abortion cases seen in health facilities was about 14.8% in the 2 years of 2019 and 2020.

These abortions are conducted in nonsterile environments by people who do not have the proficiency or licenses to practice, exposing AGYW to the risk of HIV infection as well as several other harms.⁷²

Condoms are widely available in Eswatini through various channels, including health clinics, outreach programs and commercial outlets. Different studies in Eswatini including the National Gender Assessment in the HIV response 2024 shows that as a result of being in relationships with older men, cultural norms and gender dynamics, AGYW and women have a difficulty to negotiate condom use. The government of Eswatini, along with various NGOs and international organizations, actively promote condom use as part of broader sexual health and HIV prevention strategies. The country further provides free female condoms in health facilities and public spaces, but the uptake is low compared to male condom usage.

1.2.7.4. Unmet need of contraceptives

Eswatini has made efforts to reduce the unmet need in accessing contraceptives through improving access to a range of contraceptive methods and providing accurate information and counselling that addresses cultural and societal barriers. Their efforts enable individuals and couples to make informed choices on their reproductive health and to achieve the desired family size. Despite these efforts made by the Ministry of Health and CSOs, adolescents have difficulty in accessing contraceptives in mainstream sexual reproductive health facilities as most are reportedly not user friendly to them.⁷³ Some women have limited access due to geographical barriers especially in rural communities, a certain percentage of women have concerns about safety and side effects of

⁷¹ Report on The Strategic Assessment on unintended pregnancies, contraception and post abortion care Assessment on unintended pregnancies, contraception and post abortion care

⁷² The Public Health Bill (2022) which provided for wider access to safe abortion services, was tabled in Parliament in 2022 and public and sector consultations were held with the Health Portfolio Committee. However, it was not enacted into law by the 11th Parliament, and this will cause delays in its progress as consultations and sensitizations will need to be repeated by/for the members of the 12th Parliament.

⁷³ Ministry of Health. Strategic Assessment on Unintended Pregnancies, Contraception and Post Abortion Care Report (2023)

contraceptives and some are conflicted by cultural beliefs and religious practices may influence attitudes towards contraception and family planning.⁷⁴ As a result, it was widely reported that early pregnancies rose dramatically in 2020 and 2021, when COVID-19 closed schools and exposed many AGYW to additional socio-economic risks, but this is not reflected in the 2022 MICS. The following table shows data on the unmet contraceptive needs according to MICS 2014 and 2022:

Table 11: Pregnancy and unmet need for women ,source: Eswatini Gender Assessment of the HIV Response 2024)

| MICS Indicator | Description Value | 2014 (%) | 2022 (%) | Variance (%) |
|--------------------------------------|--|----------|----------|--------------|
| Adolescent birth rate | Age-specific fertility rate for women aged 15-19 years | 87 | 78 | -9% |
| Early childbearing | Percentage of women aged 20-24 years who had at least one live birth before age 18 | 16.7% | 11.8% | -4.9% |
| Contraceptive prevalence rate | Percentage of union who are using (or whose partner is using) a (modern or traditional) contraceptive method | 66.1% | 41.3% | -24.8% |
| Unmet need | Percentage of women aged 15-49 years who are currently married or in union who are fecund and want to space their births or limit the number of children they have and who are not currently using contraception | 15.2% | 20.4% | +5.2% |

1.2.7.5. Adolescent and young women

As reported by SHIMS III in 2021, Eswatini has made progress in the HIV response through vigorous national strategies. Nevertheless, new infections among Adolescent girls remain concerning as they present 26% of all new HIV infections in the country. The Eswatini HIV-1 Recent Infection Surveillance (EHRIS) revealed that young women aged 15-24 years account for nearly half of new HIV infections in Eswatini.⁷⁵ This is as a result of numerous social, structural and behavioural risk factors that make adolescent girls and young women vulnerable to HIV

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ <https://icap.columbia.edu/news-events/in-eswatini-icap-identifies-young-women-and-adolescent-girls-as-accounting-for-nearly-half-of-new-hiv-infections/>

infections. This includes low HIV knowledge, early sexual debut, high rates of poverty, adolescent pregnancy, low secondary education, transactional sex, gender-based violence and intergenerational relationships.⁷⁶

According to UNFPA the birth rate remains high among adolescents in Eswatini with a decline from 111 births per 1,000 adolescents aged 15-19 years in 2007 to 87 births per 1,000 in 2012.⁷⁷ Teenage pregnancy is largely attributed to early and unprotected sexual activity, which shows a rapid increase of about 3% by age years to about 50% by the time adolescent girls reach 17. Contraceptive use is low (15%), and condom use at 9%. Although 75% of health facilities provide adolescent SRH services, only 26% provide youth friendly services and integrated family planning services.

Through PEPFAR support, Eswatini has implemented the Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-Free, Mentored and Safe Women (DREAMS) project targeting adolescent girls and young women to reduce HIV infection among adolescent girls. The initiative implemented in-school clubs run by youth volunteers, health clubs attached to local clinics, referral for testing and treatment for positive adolescents, tracking positive adolescents to ensure adherence to ART, providing school fees for at-risk girls. This program was implemented by a number of civil society organizations including Bantwana Initiative, PACT and AMICAALL, among others.

The constitution of Eswatini protects women and girls from being forced into marriage without consent and being subjected to customs they are opposed to the conscience. Therefore, customary practices like “*Kwendzisa or Kungenwa*” and others are no longer practiced against the free will and full consent of the intended spouse. There has been a new practice introduced that the Chief’s representative witnesses the proceedings of the traditional marriage ceremony to ensure the woman is consenting to the marriage. With regard to the legal fixed age to marry, the country is reviewing the Marriage Act of 1964 which will resolve the marriage age to 18 and align with the SODV Act of 2018. A draft Marriage Bill is currently undergoing legislative processes.

⁷⁶ UNICEF 20 For Us by Us

⁷⁷ UNFPA,

1.2.7.6 Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)

Eswatini has a high burden of communicable and non-communicable disease (NCDs), such as malaria with the latter making up 46% of deaths in 2019.⁷⁸ According to WHO Country Outlook 2023, Eswatini has not yet met the 90% target coverage rates for vaccination in children, reaching 77% with the third dose of DTP-containing vaccine and 80% with the first dose of measles-containing vaccine in 2021. There were 302 cases of malaria recorded in 2021 and zero deaths were recorded, as a result of the country's cooperation with neighbouring countries like Mozambique and increasing vaccine coverage in 2019.

For females, cervical cancer was the most commonly diagnosed cancer during the period 2014-2015 (age-standardized rate (ASR)): 75.3 per 100,000), followed by breast cancer (ASR: 15.5 per 100,000)⁷⁹. The country has established a cancer registry system and will continue to implement an equitable evidence-based intervention for prevention, early detection, treatment and care through the National Cancer Control Unit. Of the 2,077 new cancer cases recorded among Eswatini in 2016-2017, the majority (52.6%) were diagnosed in the Mbabane Government Hospital which is the national referral hospital capacitated with an oncologist, the most surgeons, and the national referral laboratory which links with Lancet for further diagnosis⁸⁰.

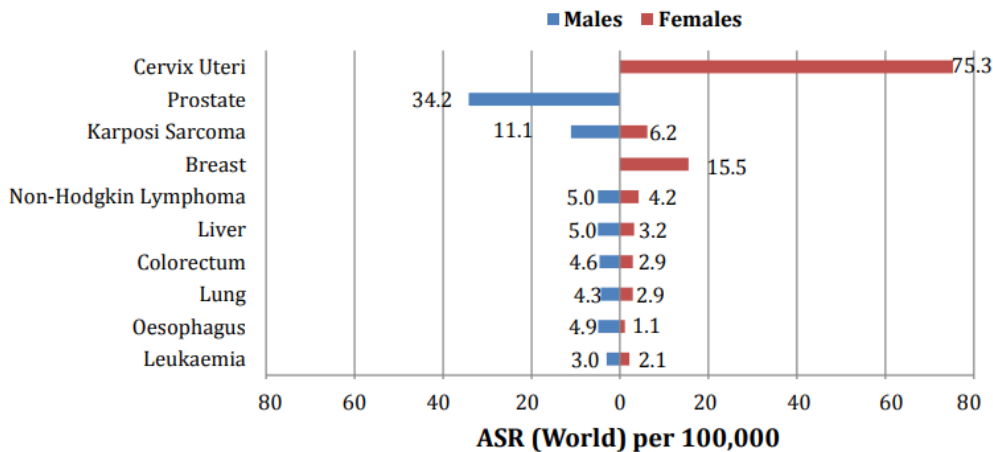


Figure 7: Age-Standardized Incidence Rates per Sex of Top Ten Leading Cancers (2014-2015), Source: Eswatini National Cancer Prevention Control Strategy 2019

⁷⁸ WHO Country Disease Outlook 2023

⁷⁹ Eswatini National Cancer Control Program Strategy 2019

⁸⁰ *ibid*

1.2.7.7. Mental Health

Mental health is a serious issue that particularly affects women in Eswatini. According to research conducted by ESEPARC on the link between mental health and unemployment, a total of 2277 individuals aged 15 to 35 sought mental health treatment in 121 clinics across the country between 2015 and 2019. Of these cases, 49% were reported by males and 51% by females. These findings indicated the crucial need for targeted interventions and support systems to address mental health challenges in Eswatini, especially among women. In response, the Ministry of Health provides psychological counselling through the Eswatini Psychiatric Centre. Civil society organizations and health facilities within communities also offer education on mental health and suicide prevention services to promote the mental well-being of the public. Education on mental health and suicide prevention services are further provided by civil society organization in collaboration with local health facilities.

1.2.8. Women aged 15-49 and HIV/AIDS Situation

Women, particularly young women, are disproportionately affected by HIV due to various biological, social and economic factors, while those who experience multiple forms of intersectional disadvantage are even more vulnerable. The Kingdom of Eswatini has a National Strategic Framework (NSF) 2024 –2028 as a guide to the national HIV response. Eswatini's national response has included targeted interventions focusing on young women and girls such as comprehensive sexual education, access to ART and programmes aimed at reducing gender-based violence and increasing knowledge of life skills, all of which influence HIV transmission. These measures are part of a broader strategy to empower women and girls, improve their health outcomes and strengthening the overall effectiveness of the HIV response in the country. Wherever possible, these approaches have acknowledged the intersectionality of health, gender equality, economic empowerment and human rights.

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The following table shows progress on the HIV incidence comparing SHIMS II (2016) and SHIMS III (2021).

Table 12: Progress on the HIV incidence comparing SHIMS II (2016) and SHIMS III (2021)

| HIV Indicator | SHIMS II (2016) | SHIMS III (2021) |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Adults Aged 15 years and older | 1.13 | 0.6 |
| Females | 1.41 | 1.11 |
| Males | 0.85 | 0.17 |
| Adults Aged 15-49 years | 1.28 | 0.77 |
| Females | 1.73 | 1.45 |
| Males | 0.85 | 0.20 |

1.2.8.1. HIV incidence, prevalence, viral load suppression and new infections

According to the UNAIDS Eswatini has made significant strides in 95-95-95 progress in HIV testing, ART initiation and Viral Load Suppression. The study indicated that a higher proportion of women living with HIV were aware of their status, at 94.9% (95% CI: 93.8%-96.0%) than men living with HIV, at 91.6% (95% CI: 89.6%-93.5%). Among those who were aware of their HIV-positive status, 97.3% were on ART: 98.1% of women and 95.9% of men. Among those aware of their status and on treatment, 96.2% had suppressed viral loads: 95.9% of women and 96.7% of men. The following pyramid shows a summary of the 95-95-95 progress by sex:

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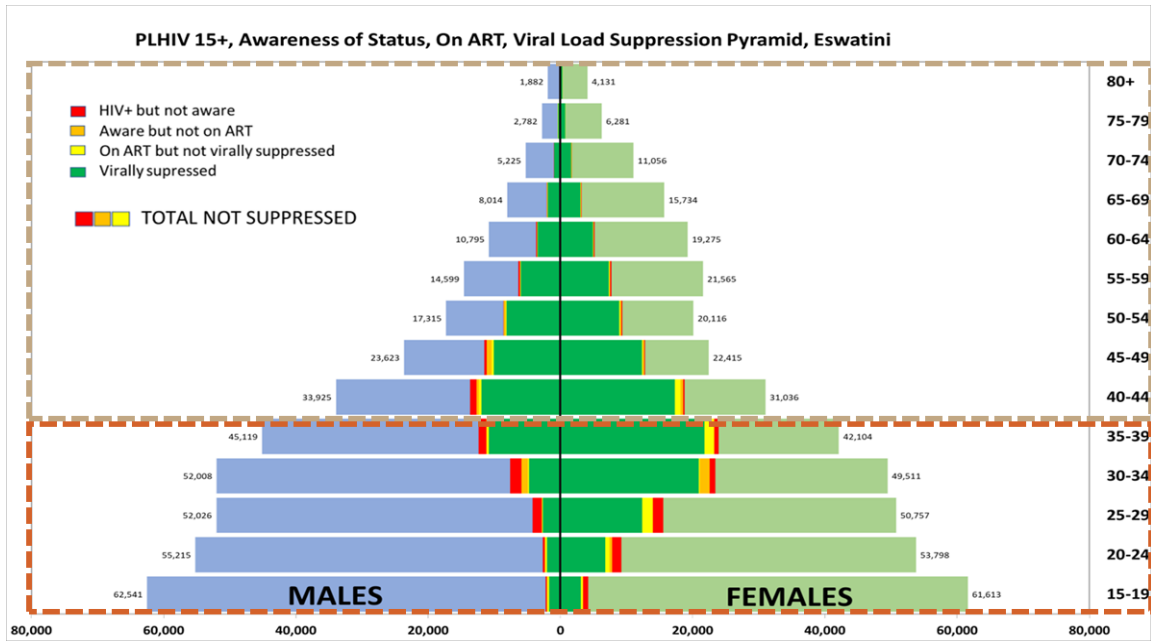


Figure 8: Population Pyramid (SHIMS 2021)

Latest National Prevalence

The SHIMS III (2021) report reveals that the adult HIV prevalence is 24.8%. The epidemic disproportionately affects women more than men. Prevalence of HIV is almost two times higher among females aged 15 years and older, at 30.4%, than among males,⁸¹

⁸¹ Swaziland HIV Incidence Measurement Survey (SHIMS) 3, 2021

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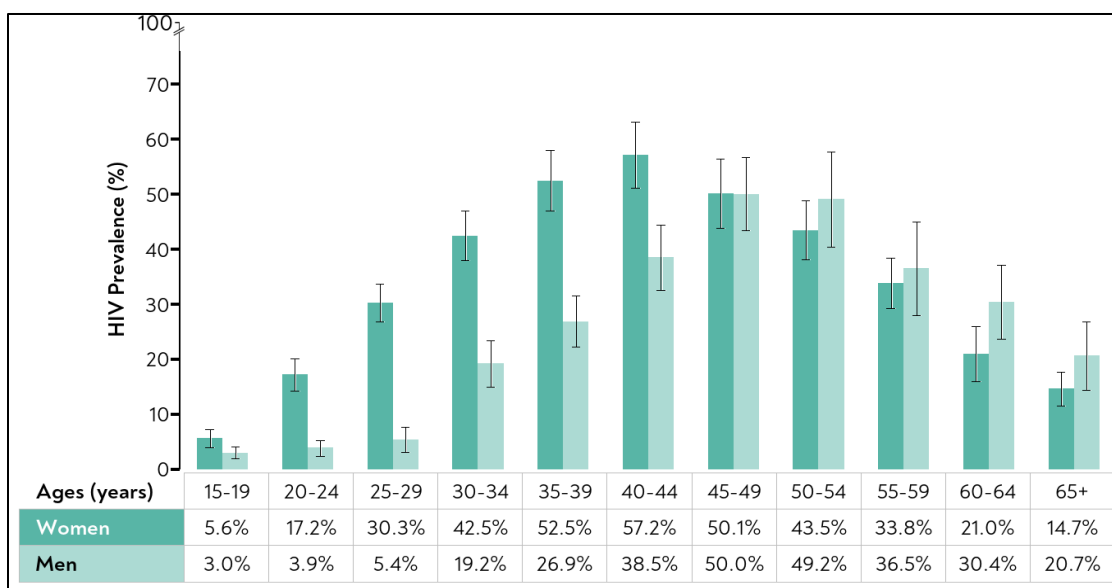


Figure 9: HIV prevalence by sex and age (SHIMS 2021)

HIV prevalence ranges from 5.6% among adolescent girls aged 15-19 years to 11.86% among females aged 15-24 years, until a peak of 57.2% among women aged 40-44 years.⁸² Men and boys have a consistently lower prevalence rates throughout the lifecycle until aged 45-49, when prevalence rates are similar to that of Swati women of the same age (at 50% and 50.1% respectively), after which male prevalence exceeds that of females for the remainder of the lifecycle. Adolescent boys have a comparative low prevalence rate of 3.0%, rising slowly until they are 30-34 years old, when a sharp increase in prevalence (up to 50.0%) is observed in older men aged 45-49 years.⁸³ This “double-peak”, one for AGYW and women throughout their 20s, and another for men in their early-mid 30s, may be largely attributed to gender roles and social dynamics associated with men and women at different times of their lives. Adolescent boys and young men have later sexual debut and are less likely to have intergenerational relationships with older sexual partners, while many adolescent girls and young women see themselves as more mature than their age-mates and therefore have older sexual partners, often men in their 30s, who have social and financial power.

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ Ibid

The increase of female sex worker among youth due to high unemployment

Although fears of criminality, the informality and ad hoc nature of sex work make demographic data unreliable, it is believed that the female sex worker (FSW) community has increased over recent years in Eswatini, due to a very high youth unemployment rate, a high female school-drop rate and urbanization. According to the Integrated Biological-Behavioural Surveillance Survey (IBBSS) of 2021 Eswatini has an estimated population of 12,274 female sex workers. The HIV prevalence among female sex workers (FSW) is considerably higher than that of the general population, at an estimated 58.8%, while among that of men who have sex with men is 21.0%, and 41.2% among transgender (TG) individuals. Through civil society organizations, the country has engaged FSWs to provide HIV prevention education and ensure that they can access protective commodities including condoms. These programmes further engage law enforcement to uphold the rights of the female sex workers without exposing them to violence or discrimination based on the nature of their work, although it has been thus far difficult to assess the efficacy of such initiatives. These initiatives further work towards addressing stigma and discrimination faced by FSWs and TG individuals in accessing health care services. This is achieved through engaging multiple stakeholders including the government, healthcare providers and the law enforcement with the aim to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for key populations at high risk of HIV transmission.

Latest National Incidence

Annual incidence of HIV among adults (aged 15 years and older) in Eswatini is 0.62%, which corresponds to approximately 4,000 new cases of HIV per year among adults.⁸⁴ HIV incidence was nearly seven times higher among women, at 1.11%, than among men (0.17%) for adults aged 15 years and above. Among adolescents and young people, the incidence was also higher among females at 1.63% compared to their male counterparts at 0.17% as indicated in Table 13 below.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Swaziland HIV Incidence Measurement Survey (SHIMS) 3, 2021

⁸⁵ All *ibid.* SHIMS 2021 did not provide data showing HIV incidence rate disaggregated by region.

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Table 13: HIV incidence among adults by sex (source: SHIMS 2021)

| SHIMS 2021 | 15 –24 years olds | | Adults 15 years and above | |
|------------|-------------------|--------|---------------------------|--------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Incidence | 0.17 | 1.63 | 0.17 | 1.11 |

New HIV Infections

New HIV infections for all ages were estimated to be 4,954 in 2022 and are projected to decrease to 3,572 in 2027.⁸⁶ Across all the years, new HIV infections remain at least 2-times higher for females than for males.

Figure 10 shows the estimated total number of new HIV infections (2021-2023).

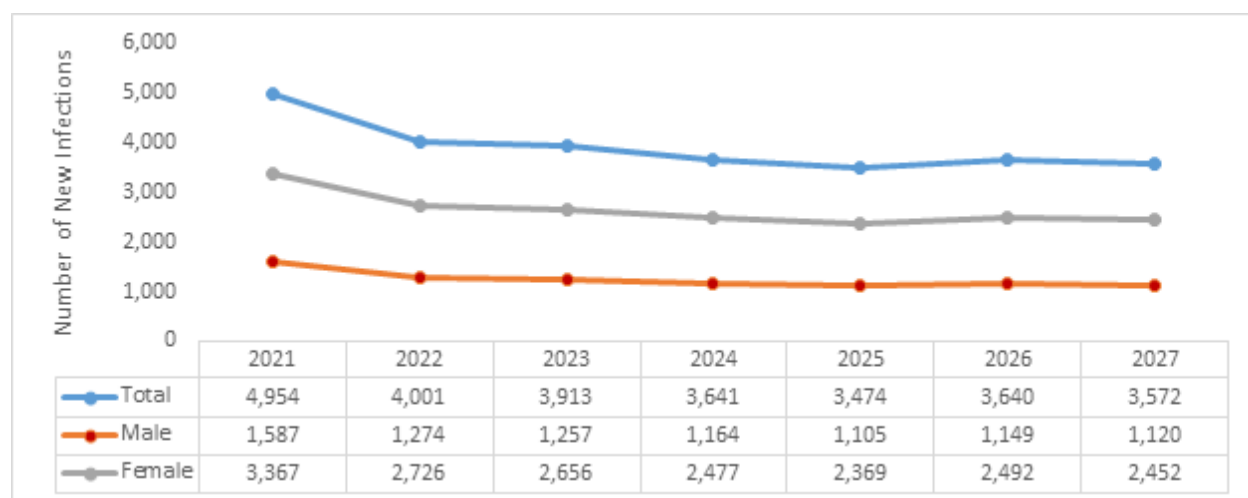


Figure 10: Eswatini HIV Estimates and Projection Report 2023

Antiretroviral therapy (ART)

HIV treatment, care and support for people living with HIV (PLHIV) remains a priority component of the national HIV response. Evidence shows that effective ART has a potential of reducing HIV viral load and can contribute to the prevention of new infections by 95%. Currently more than 80% of the public facilities are already accredited to provide ART services and more than 60% of the ART initiations in the country are done by nurses who have been trained on ART initiation.⁸⁷ The SHIMS III (2021) results shows remarkable results in the second and third cascade targets: Among

⁸⁶ Eswatini HIV Estimates and Projection Report, 2023

⁸⁷ Eswatini National AIDS Programme (ENAP)

adults living with HIV who were aware of their status, 97.3% were on ART, and among adults who were on ART, 96.2% had suppressed viral loads. The percentage of women who know their HIV status and are not on ART is high among adolescent girls (15-19 years) and higher among men aged (30-34). Figure 11 below shows the proportion of adults living with HIV who reported awareness of their HIV status and are on ART (SHIMS,2021).



Figure 11: Proportion of adults living with HIV who reported awareness of HIV status and antiretroviral therapy use by sex and age (SHIMS 2021)

1.2.8.2. Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission

The Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) programme reduced the mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) to less than 2% at 6-8 weeks.⁸⁸ The country has developed an Elimination of Mother to child transmission of HIV and Syphilis strategy 2018-2022. Integrated HIV guidelines addendum for the amendment of the HIV guidelines 2019 and an operational plan for eMTCT 2020-2022. Communities were engaged by the Ministry of Health to sensitize the public on PMTCT through Rural Health Motivators. Male engagement in PMTCT initiatives have

⁸⁸ Eswatini UPR 2021

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been rolled-out with clinics hosting Men’s Health Day on Tuesdays, where men accompany their spouses to the facility and are given priority.

The following graph shows the country’s progress in prevention on mother to child transmission:

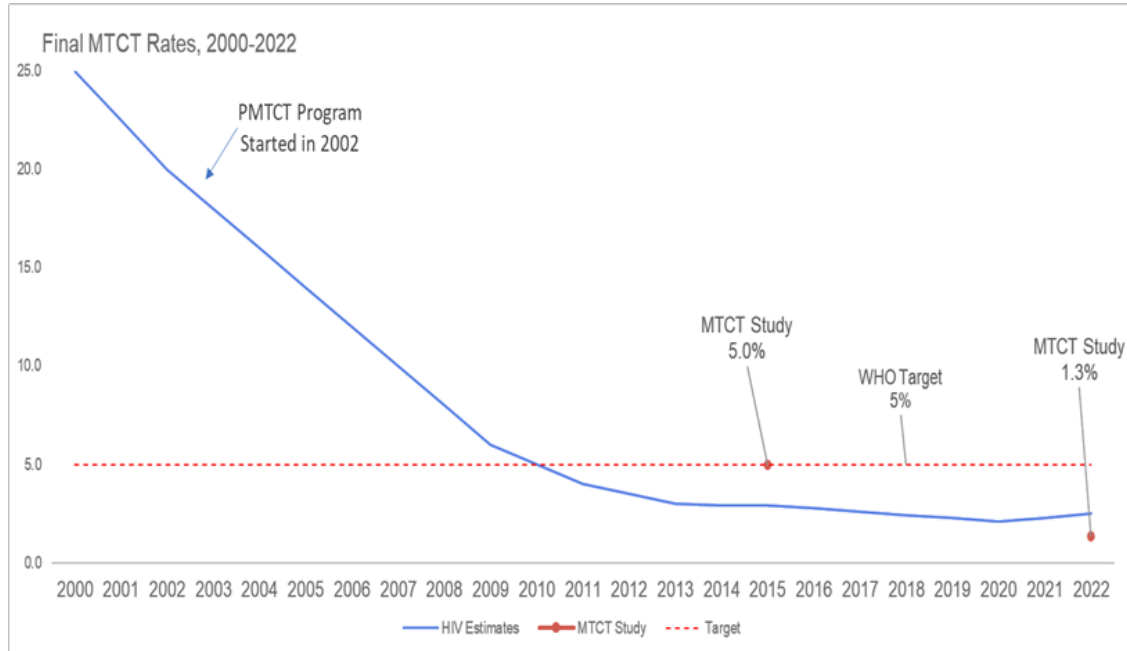


Figure 12: Mother to child transmission rates 2000-2022 (E-PIMS 2022)

The following figure shows the Eswatini PMTCT Cascade:

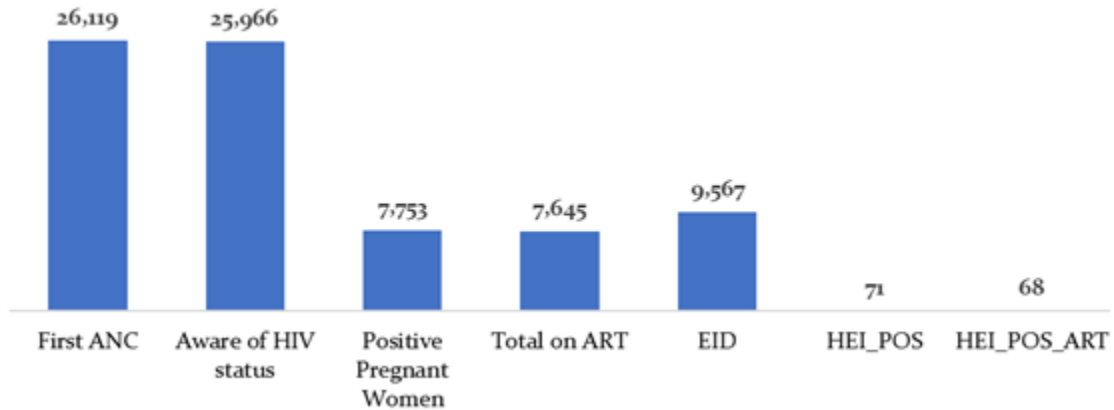


Figure 13: Eswatini PMTCT Cascade (Eswatini Country Operation Plan 2023)

1.2.8.3. Treatment, care and support

Eswatini has made significant strides in expanding access to ART. The government provides free ART through its national program, ensuring that people living with HIV including women have access to the treatment. ART coverage among pregnant women has been particularly successful in preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

With this progress made, programs aimed at providing psychosocial support for women living with HIV have not been provided as women are psychologically burdened as a result of social norms. Educational campaigns and outreach efforts target women to increase awareness about HIV prevention, testing, and treatment options with emphasis on mental health. The efforts are further strengthened through community support groups that are monitored and supported by local facilities to improve adherence to treatment. These initiatives also empower women to negotiate safe sex.

Women often face social stigma, which can deter them from seeking testing and treatment services. Eswatini conducted an HIV Stigma, Discrimination and Human Rights Survey which included 1136 respondents which 10% experienced HIV related stigma and discrimination in a form of remarks and verbal harassment. The survey has informed policies and programs to improve systems. Rural and marginalized communities, where many women live, may have limited access to healthcare facilities and HIV services. Efforts to improve infrastructure and outreach are ongoing to ensure that adequate care is provided to WLHIV.

1.2.8.4. HIV related deaths

Estimates reveal that there were 1,458 AIDS-related deaths among females, 1,181 among males in 2022 of which 137 were among children (total: 2713), indicating a year-on-year decline.⁸⁹ The HIV Estimates and Projections Report 2023 indicates that AIDS-related deaths among females are higher compared to males throughout all the estimation and projection years.

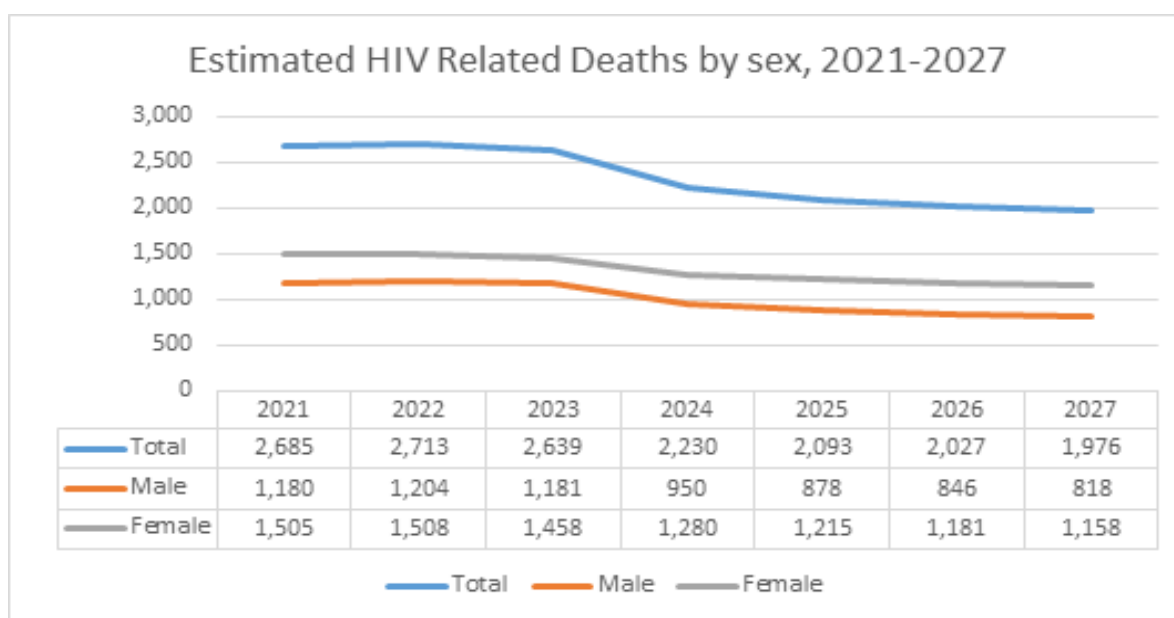


Figure 14: Estimated AIDS-related deaths by sex from 2021 to 2023 (source: Eswatini Estimates and Projection Report 2023).

1.2.8.5. Access to PrEP

The country introduced oral PrEP for HIV prevention in 2016 with policies that ensure all HIV negative pregnant and post-natal women have access to preventative measures. While there is clear emphasis on providing access to women, particularly to vulnerable groups like young, pregnant and post-natal women, there is a noted gap in studies focusing on drivers of PrEP uptake among men who have sex with women. Event-driven PrEP, which appears to be more appealing to some men, has been effective in reducing the likelihood of men who have sex with women acquiring HIV during vaginal sexual intercourse.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ HIV Estimates and Projections Report 2023

⁹⁰ Ibid

The Kingdom of Eswatini Country Progress Report on the Implementation Of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – July 2024

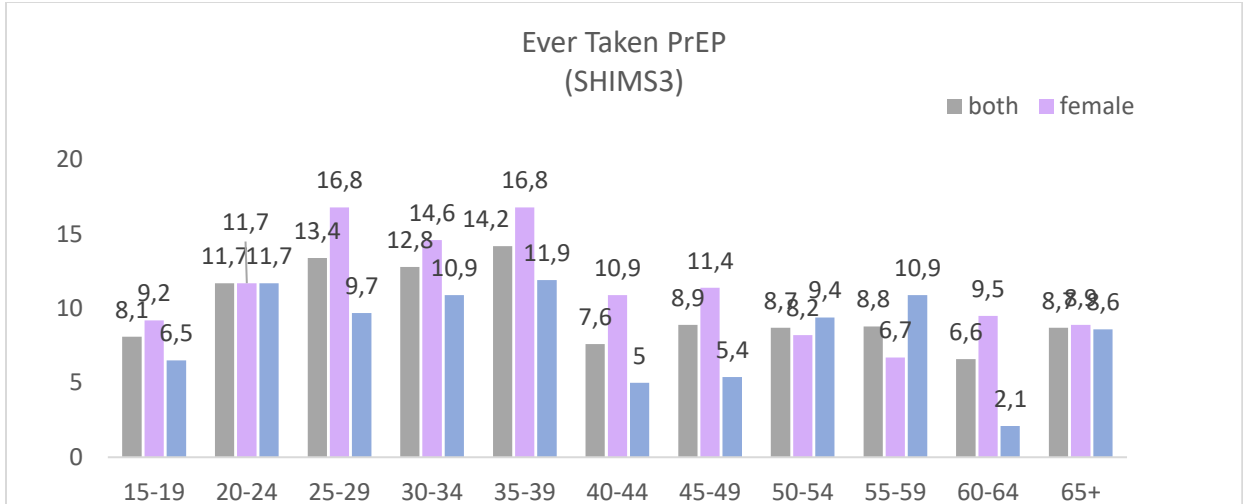


Figure 15: People who have taken PrEP by age and sex (SHIMS 2021)

Setbacks and Challenges in the HIV Response

- NERCHA estimated that 216,000 adults live with HIV, with a disproportionate burden on women. In 2021 through SHIMS III the country learnt the HIV prevalence is almost two times higher among females aged 15 years and older, at 30.4%, than among males (at 18.7%)
- The Integrated Biological-Behavioural Surveillance Survey (IBBSS) of 2021 indicates that the HIV prevalence among female sex workers (FSW) is considerably higher than that of the general population.
- HIV incidence is nearly seven times higher among women at 1.11% than among men at 0.17% for adults aged 15 years and above. Young women and adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to HIV due to factors such as early sexual debut, transactional sex, and limited knowledge about HIV prevention.
- Gender disparities contribute significantly to the HIV epidemic among women. Cultural norms and practices often limit women's ability to negotiate safe sex practices, access HIV testing and treatment, and make decisions about their sexual health.
- Gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence and sexual violence, increases women's vulnerability to HIV.

1.2.9. Life expectancy

According to the World Health Organization, the life expectancy in Eswatini has improved 7.55 years from 47 years in 2000 to 54.6 years in 2021. The major causes of death are HIV/AIDS, lower

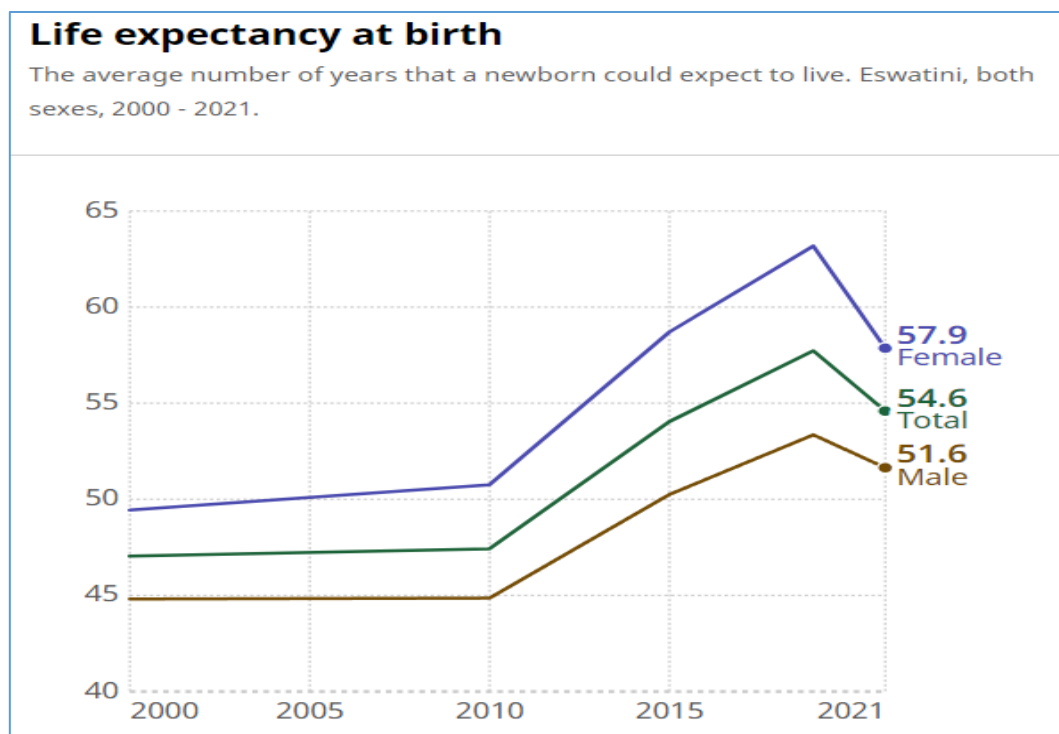


Figure 16: Life Expectancy at Birth (2000-2021)

respiratory infection, Diabetes, Stroke, heart disease, diarrheal disease, neonatal conditions, road injury, kidney disease, self-harm.⁹¹

Setbacks and Challenges in Health including SRH

- Access to healthcare, especially reproductive health services, remains a critical issue. Many women in rural areas lack access to essential health services due to geographical barriers and inadequate healthcare infrastructure. Furthermore, there is a shortage of trained healthcare providers, and cultural taboos surrounding reproductive health impede women's ability to seek necessary care (Ministry of Health, 2020).
- Inadequate medical supplies in some health facilities.
- The maternal mortality ration continues to be high 452 per 100,000 live births

⁹¹ World Health Organization Country Data. <https://data.who.int/countries/748>

1.2.10. Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) in Eswatini and many other countries remain a persistent challenge disproportionately affecting women and girls despite the local and international efforts including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. One in 3 females having experienced some form of sexual abuse by the age of 18 years and 48% of women reported to having experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetime⁹². According to the National Surveillance System on Violence 2024⁹³ there has been a 50% increase in reported GBV cases between 2017 and 2023, likely due to increased awareness on the types of violence and laws like the Social Offences and Sexual Violence Act (SOVDA) 2018⁹⁴. In that period, 60% of cases were reported by females, 66% incidents reported were perpetrated on adults above 18 and 34% to minors, alarmingly 88% perpetrated by person known to the survivor. It is also widely assumed that violence perpetrated by intimate partners and other close family members is the least reported, due to economic dependence, power dynamics, shame and a cultural precedence of keeping family secrets “*Tibi Tendlu*”.⁹⁵ The figure below shows trends in GBV cases reported in 2017-2023:

⁹² Violence Against Children and Youth Survey 2022

⁹³ National Surveillance Survey on Violence 2024

⁹⁴ Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act 2018

⁹⁵ The Kingdom of Eswatini’s Country Progress on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, May 2019

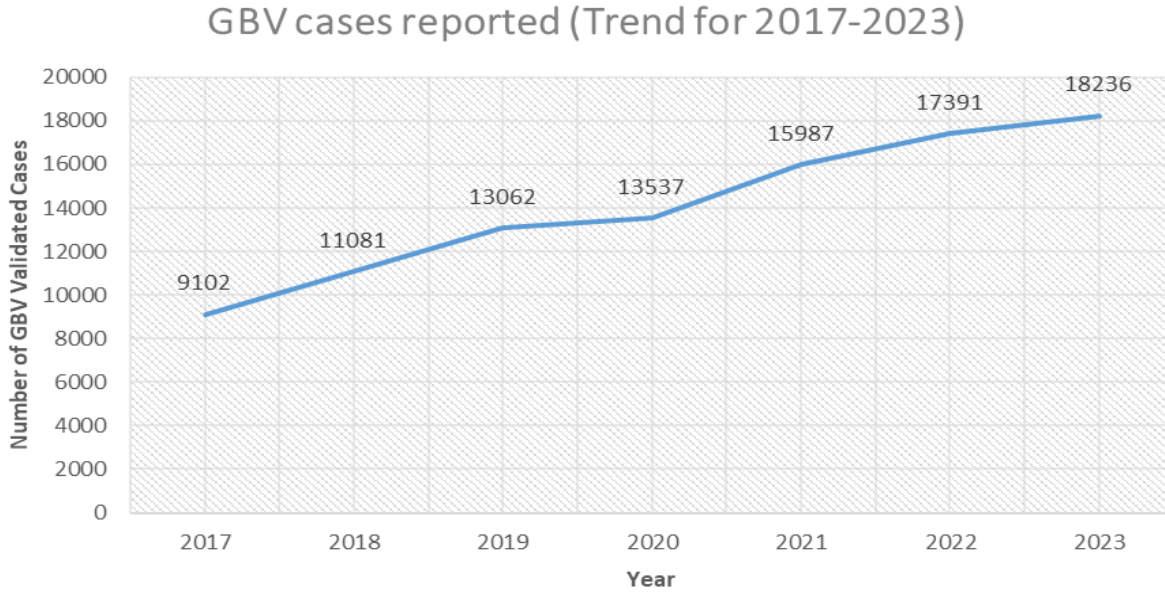


Figure 17: The trends of GBV cases reported from 2017 to 2023 (source: NSSV 2023 Annual Report, 2024)

The figure below shows that a significant percentage (64%) of abuse takes place at home, almost three times that which takes place in open fields or public places (22%).⁹⁶ The 2021 study on drivers of intimate partner violence drew findings that, socializations, globalization, individual behaviour, infidelity and trust issues are the main drivers of IPV.

⁹⁶ National Surveillance Survey on Violence (2024)

GBV incidence by Location

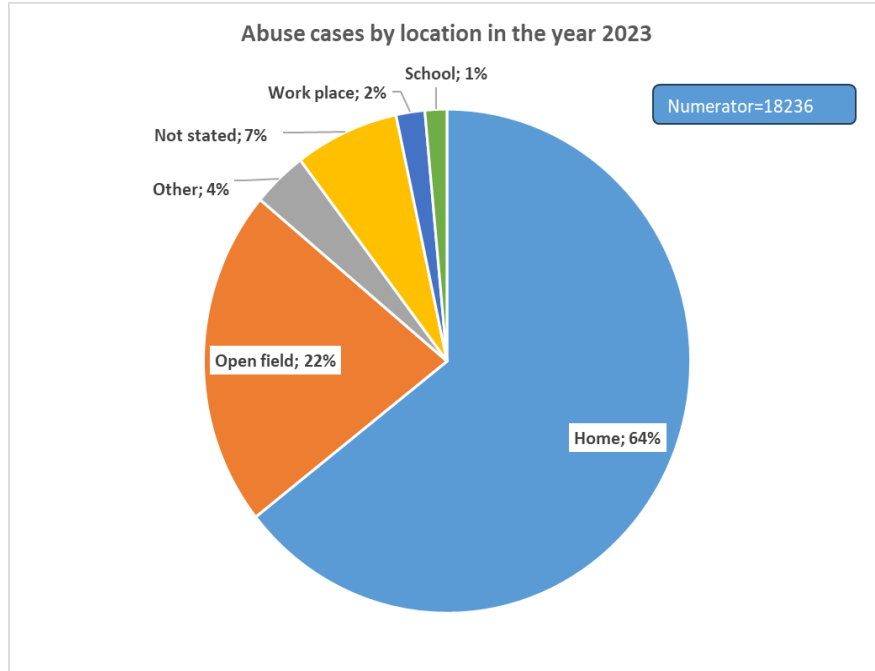


Figure 18: GBV incidence by location (NSSV 2024)

The rate of violence against children and child sexual abuse in Eswatini is alarming, with 25.5% of females and 31.7% of males aged 13 to 24 having experienced any lifetime violence (includes experience of physical, sexual, and emotional violence at any age (0-24)),⁹⁷ as shown by Figure 19 below.

⁹⁷National Surveillance Survey on Violence 2024 .

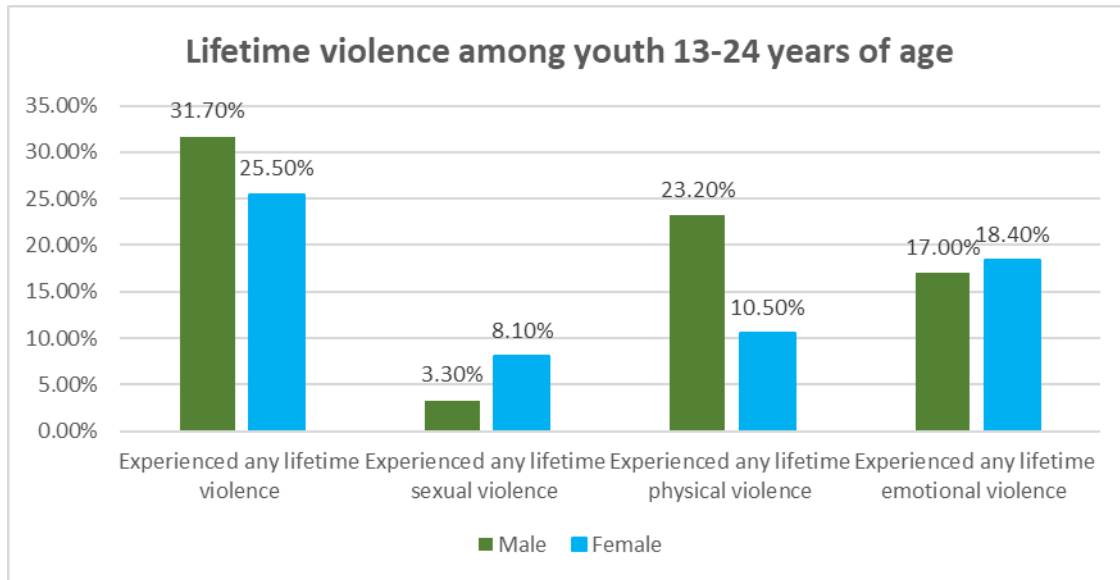


Figure 19: Lifetime experiences of violence among 13–24-year-olds (VACS 2022)

COVID-19 and related restrictions substantially hampered Eswatini’s progress in reducing the incidence of GBV. In the first month following the 2020 movement restrictions, local CSOs reported that the number of GBV cases referred to them had doubled.⁹⁸ The Deputy Prime Minister’s Office also reported that GBV cases saw a stark increase from 1,420 to 9,399 in the 9 months following restrictions.⁹⁹ It is suspected that this increase in reported GBV cases is primarily caused by the containment of women and children in households with abusers, compromising their safety.

As the adopted BPfA declared GBV as violation of human rights, the country has made efforts through legal reform, policies and initiatives by the government and civil society organizations to eradicate all forms of gender-based violence and mitigate risk. This national commitment has been made through the multisector National Strategy to Eliminate End Violence 2023-2027.¹⁰⁰ This strategy is aligned to the legal framework, the constitution and other international commitments the country has signed to. The Strategy recognized that a systematic multisector response is central to eradicating GBV in Eswatini. In this effort, the country continues to fully align with the commitments made under the Beijing Declaration. As outlined in the National Strategy this

⁹⁸ Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse (SWAGAA) 2020

⁹⁹ International Commission of Jurists (2 June 2020)

¹⁰⁰ The National Strategy to End Violence 2023-2027

includes preventing all forms of violence, supporting victims/survivors and their families, promoting responsive legal and justice systems, promoting partnership and coordination for an effective violence prevention and response, and strengthening monitoring and evaluation in the GBV response.¹⁰¹ The Government, through the Head of State, has publicly condemned the act of gender-based violence and femicide happening in the country. ¹⁰² Days later, the Deputy Prime Minister, speaking on behalf of the newly appointed cabinet mirrored these words.

In 2024, the Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini implemented the first GBV symposium, convening different actors in GBV prevention to reflect on the country's progress towards ending violence and getting expert views to strategize in the GBV response. To increase public reach, bus rank and community based GBV prevention roadshows have been rolled out to address societal norms and provide information on preventing and reporting cases. These efforts reach a peak yearly during the 16 Days of Activism Against GBV.

Setbacks and Challenges in the GBV Response

- Gender-based violence remains pervasive, with high rates of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking. Despite legal frameworks in place, reporting and prosecution rates are low due to stigma, fear of retaliation, and lack of trust in the justice system. Many survivors do not receive adequate support and protection, highlighting gaps in the provision of victim services and shelters (Human Rights Commission, 2022).
- A higher number of gender-based violence cases are perpetrated against women and girls, approximately 1 in 3 females having experienced some form of sexual abuse by age 18 year and 48% of women reported to have experiences some form of sexual abuse in their lifetime (SWAGAA, VACS 2022)
- Lack of institutional capacity to coordinate issues of violence at national level which has further delayed processes including the implementation of the National Sex Offenders Register as outlined in the SODV Act 2018.
- There is backlog in the justice system which makes the process slow in presiding over cases.

¹⁰¹The National Strategy to End Violence 2023-2027

¹⁰²Speech from the Throne, End of Year Prayer Ceremony, 11.11.23. Source: Human Rights Watch website, 2023.

Section 2: Priorities for Accelerating Progress of Women and Girls

2.1. Quality education, training and life-learning for women and girls

While primary education is generally accessible because of the Government introducing free primary education in 2010, challenges for women and girls still arise in higher levels. This is due to family financial constraints, early marriages of girls and other factors that limit girl's access and retention in school. This is further solidified by the limited national budget for scholarships for higher learning institutions. The Government of Eswatini recognizes the importance of education the importance of education and the role it plays in human capital and transforming the country's economic and social landscape.¹⁰³ The country is committed to achieving Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5 related to quality education and gender equality.

Eswatini ensures all ages have access to education through the four levels of the country's education system: early childhood care, development, and education (ECDE), primary education, secondary education, and post-school education and training (PSET) comprising of tertiary education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET).¹⁰⁴ Eswatini has further increased education opportunities for those who never enrolled in, or who dropped out of the formal education system through non-formal Adult Education and lifelong Learning (AELL) programs.¹⁰⁵ Individuals can access non-formal primary and secondary education through Sebenta National Institute (SNI) and Emlaladini Development Centre (EDC). The Ministry of Education and development partners are implementing programmes to promote STEM and TVET among women and girls. This strategic approach will close the gap of having fewer women and girls in these fields as a result of addressing these barriers.

2.2. Eliminating violence against women and girls

The Kingdom of Eswatini has undertaken various approaches and strategies towards ending all form of discrimination and violence against women and girls. As stated in many country reports, women and girls are discriminated in many ways often disguised as tradition, customs as well as

¹⁰³ World Bank. Eswatini Education Sector Analysis 2021

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*

patriarchal norms and values which society has held on to in the name of indigenous culture. The country enforces laws that protect women and girls and ensuring that the perpetrators are held accountable and justice is provided to survivors. The Kingdom of Eswatini enacted the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence (SODV) Act No. 15 of 2018.¹⁰⁶ This Act makes provision concerning sexual offences and domestic violence, prevention and the protection of all persons from harm and acts of domestic violence amongst others. It serves as deterrent to a lot of discrimination, exploitation and mainly violence against women and girls who are considered as the most vulnerable groups of society. Regulations have been recently developed to facilitate holistic implementation of the SODV Act which include the establishment of specific institutions to further enhance the protection of women and children.

The Government developed and is implementing the National Strategy to End Violence 2023-2027,¹⁰⁷ which is a response to the realization of the multisectoral approach to the prevention and response to violence. As such there has been advancement in the male engagement agenda being formed into the Men Engage Network to engage men and boys on gender equality, prevention of violence and abuse in all settings. The civil society organizations have played a vital role leading on initiatives that eliminate violence and discrimination against women and girls. The civil society coordinated by the Deputy Prime Minister's Office (DGFI) continues to advocate for stronger laws against gender –based violence, provides shelter for survivors and offering psychosocial support.

To build capacity for frontline workers, the Government provides continuous training . The Royal Eswatini Police Services (REPS) The Government also provides continuous capacity building training for frontline workers to ensure that officers are well equipped to handle gender-based violence cases with sensitivity and competence while taking into account the psychosocial support needs of survivors and ensuring access to justice These trainings include refresher training on the country's legal framework and standards for handling GBV cases and accurate reporting of sensitive stories including GBV. . The Government, through civil society, has developed a guideline for Journalists and Editors on GBV reporting in 2020 ¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act 2018

¹⁰⁷ National Strategy to End Violence 2023-2027

¹⁰⁸ <https://allafrica.com/view/resource/main/main/id/00130235.html>

2.3. Access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health and rights

Eswatini health facilities provide services to all citizens regardless on their sexual orientation or gender identity. The country has increased health facilities to 327 resulting to 85% being within a radius of 8 km and 52% are at least youth friendly according to the Ministry of Health. Through PEPFAR support mobile clinics including DREAMS on wheels focusing on Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) provide comprehensive health services. Several health care workers have been trained in the provision of quality Youth friendly services, neonatal care and oriented on the Antenatal Care Guidelines. The SRHR services are provided for free in Government health facilities. The Government targets migrants to access health care services and further providing services to communities, religious sector, sex workers, AGYW and LGBTIQ+.

These efforts aim to increase access to essential health services for vulnerable populations and reduce health disparities. The Ministry of Health hopes to improve the overall health outcomes by promoting inclusivity in healthcare delivery. To fortify these efforts MOH works collaboratively with NGOs and community-based organizations to reach marginalized populations and provide culturally sensitive care. The Ministry also works to implement policies and programmes that address discrimination and stigma within health care settings. To further create a more inclusive environment for all individuals seeking care, the MOH provides in-services training for health care workers on client-centered service delivery.

2.4. Political participation and representation

Efforts to increase women's participation in political and public life have seen progress, with more women being elected to leadership positions. Eswatini Enacted a Women Members into the House of Assembly Act No 06 of 2018 to ensure representation of women in the event elected women to not constitute 30%. The government's commitment to gender quotas and initiatives to train and mentor women leaders have contributed to greater representation of women in decision-making roles.¹⁰⁹ In the 2023 National Elections, the number of women nominated that ran in the national elections increased, as a result of the “vote for women campaign”. For just the second time since independence, a woman was appointed as the Deputy Prime Minister. This is a huge landmark,

¹⁰⁹ Eswatini Elections and Boundaries Commission, 2023

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which shows the commitment to the emancipation of women. Additionally, five women were appointed as Cabinet Ministers. Generally, the perceptions and narratives on women’s leadership capabilities have changed as more women are emerging into positions of power and influence within the administration and private sector.

There has been a continuous advocacy programmes through the DPMO and civil society between the 2018 and 2023 elections which resulted in 11% improvement of women elected to MP positions and 10% increase of women as Indvuna Yenkhundla (constituency head).¹¹⁰ Below is the 2023 elections statistics:

Table 14: Eswatini National Elections Results (Eswatini CESCR final Report-6 June 2024)

| REGION | BUCOPHO | | | INDVUNA YENKHUNDLA | | | MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT | | |
|------------|---------|--------|------------|--------------------|--------|-----------|----------------------|--------|-----------|
| | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total |
| Hhohho | 69 | 10 | 79 | 13 | 2 | 15 | 14 | 1 | 15 |
| Lubombo | 45 | 11 | 56 | 11 | 0 | 11 | 9 | 2 | 11 |
| Manzini | 89 | 13 | 102 | 18 | 0 | 18 | 16 | 2 | 18 |
| Shiselweni | 81 | 18 | 99 | 14 | 1 | 15 | 12 | 3 | 15 |
| Total | 284 | 52 | 336 | 56 | 3 | 59 | 51 | 8 | 59 |
| Percentage | 85% | 15% | | 95% | 5% | | 86% | 14% | |

The Government worked in collaboration with civil society organizations, and the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) in June 2022 as a preparation process of the 2023 elections conducted dialogue in communities fostering an enabling environment for women in politics and electoral participation. The workshops provided an opportunity for deliberation on the barriers hindering the election and participation of women in political and leadership positions. Socialization was identified as the root cause and perception or stereotypes.¹¹¹ Furthermore, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and Eswatini Local Government Association

¹¹⁰ Eswatini CESCR final Report - 6 June 2024

¹¹¹ Eswatini CESCR final Report - 6 June 2024

(ELGA), collaborated with the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) to implement a capacity-building project for a period of three years (2020-2022). The objective of the project was to increase the participation of women in local level politics, administration, and economic development in line with Sustainable Development Goal 5 through the establishment and strengthening of women's networks. It also advocated women's equal representation in local Government.¹¹²

Setbacks and Challenges of Promoting Women's Political Participation

- Women's political participation and representation in decision-making positions remain limited. Cultural norms and societal attitudes often discourage women from pursuing leadership roles. While the government has introduced gender quotas, the actual implementation and effectiveness of these measures are inconsistent, and women continue to be underrepresented in political and public life (Eswatini Elections and Boundaries Commission, 2023).
- Over the years women register in their numbers for elections and make a higher percentage and participate in the election processes, but the number are low in nominations and voting for political positions. Some men and even women still have reservations about women occupying positions of leadership and decision making which requires challenging these stereotypes to change mind-sets.
- The pervasive and patriarchal attitudes which perpetuates gender inequalities in various institutions in society.

2.5. Digital and financial inclusion for women

The National Development Strategy 2005-2022, popularly known as “Vision 2022” outlined that, by the year 2022, the Kingdom of Eswatini will have attained a level of development akin to that of developed countries while ensuring that all citizens are able to sustainably pursue their goals, enjoying lives of value and dignity in a safe and secure environment in line with the Sustainable Development objectives. Despite being inhibited by COVID-19 in its final years, through this strategy the country has made progress in promoting women's digital and financial inclusion.

The Eswatini Gender Inclusion Finance Roadmap (2021) acknowledges that while more women are financially included than men (by 3 percentage points), many women continue to face barriers accessing and opening accounts, accessing credit for their business and having the income levels

¹¹² Eswatini CESC final Report - 6 June 2024

and financial literacy needed to use a wide range of financial products safely and effectively. The roadmap highlights gender sensitive regulation (e.g. SACCO framework, agency banking, tiered KYC) financial education and digital literacy, leveraging of digital services, collection of disaggregated data, simplified collateral regime and gender sensitive products and services among others. The SADC gender action plan 2023 further promotes equitable access to financial services and financial inclusion of women-owned businesses and women entrepreneurs.

The National Financial Strategy 2023-2028 aims to strengthen the delivery of financial services and products in ways that are available, accessible and affordable to all genders. The target is to increase adult access from 43% to 75% and reduce the excluded from 27% to 15%. This will be achieved through expanding mobile money services (e-money), increasing usage of banks, reducing the risk of management of financial services and devising alternatives ways of serving the underprivileged. The strategy will further target the under-served in rural areas including women and youth Micro, Small and Medium Entrepreneurs in the agriculture and other sectors. This will also facilitate participation of women and youth entrepreneurs in economic activities particularly women in informal sector who often lack access to credit for business start-ups and growth. Studies show that the informal sector provides employment to 40.2% women compared to 25.5% men.¹¹³

Eswatini has enacted the Citizen's Economic Empowerment Act 2023 to enable equal participation of women in economic transformation. The Act seeks to, among other issues, promote gender equality in accessing, owning, managing and controlling and exploiting economic resources. The Government has further established the Federation of National Associations of women in business in Eastern and Southern Africa (FEMCOM) along a strategic plan 2018-2022. This structure is responsible for facilitating economic empowerment of women and youth entrepreneurs by promoting programmes which integrate women into trade and development activities.

The Government continues to emphasize digital literacy and Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) skills in schools. And developed the online learning environment that resulted

¹¹³ Eswatini CESCR final Report - 6 June 2024

from the COVID-19 pandemic. The MoET continues to provide equipment through support from international partners and developing ICT syllabi at primary and secondary levels.

According to DATAREPORTAL, there were 708,000 internet users in Eswatini at the start of 2024, when internet penetration stood at 58.3%. Social media users in January 2024 were 410,000, equating to 33.7% of the total population. A total of 1.31 million cellular mobiles connections were active in Eswatini in early 2024, which equates to 108% of the total population.¹¹⁴ Generally, women are not restricted to use cell phones and the Computer Crimes and Cyber Crimes Act of 2022 has been enacted to protect digital rights of all citizens including cyber bullying and cyber-based sexual offences.

Setbacks and Challenges in Digital and Financial Inclusion

- Most women do informal micro and small businesses which are not attractive to substantial credit for business growth. They lack collateral as security for accessing loans.
- Access to the internet service is an essential driver to enable women's participation in ICT, there is still a challenge in terms of cost and connectivity. Free sources of internet are limited.

2.6. Prevention of multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination and promoting the rights of women and girls

2.6.1. Women with disabilities

Women with disabilities in Eswatini face significant barriers to achieving equality and accessing opportunities in various spheres of life. According to the UNPRDR Situational Analysis 58% females live with disability. As a result, disabilities often face social stigma and discrimination, leading to exclusion from community activities and decision-making processes. These negative attitudes affect their self-esteem and mental well-being. Women living with disability are at a higher risk of experiencing gender-based violence, including sexual abuse and exploitation. The perception is that perpetrators are highly unlikely to ever be successfully prosecuted making it difficult for women with disabilities obtaining access to justice.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-eswatini>

¹¹⁵ UNPRDR Eswatini Situational Analysis

The country established a National Disability Unit under the Deputy Prime Minister's Office to ensure support the development of all relevant disability frameworks that create an enabling environment to mainstream issues of disability across all sectors.¹¹⁶ This included the enactment of the 2018 Persons with Disability Act which protects the rights and welfare of Persons with Disability. The National Disability Plan of Action 2018-2022 was developed and costed (a successor plan is also being drafted for the period after 2022). However, implementation has been hindered by lack of funding. To increase public awareness, weekly radio programs are conducted by the Federation of Organizations for the Disabled Swaziland (FODSWA) on national radio (EBIS). The Government works in collaboration with relevant stakeholders in implementing a number of initiatives to uphold and safeguard the inherent dignity of PWD. This support includes the distribution of assistive devices and medical equipment to various institutions to promote and safeguard the rights of PWD. There is training and special education provided at Ekululameni (also known as St Joseph's Mission) to equip PWD on entrepreneurship and business skills including carpentry, welding and sawing, to name a few.

Eswatini has designed and is implementing programs to support Persons with Albinism (PWA) which includes community dialogues to changes the stereotypical negative thinking and myths about PWA as well as protecting them from harmful practices. The Ministry of Health dermatology department further collaborates with partners to provide hats, sunglasses and cryotherapy equipment. To monitor the and effectively determined the needs of PWD in their gender and disability diversities, the country is developing an information management system that will register PWD, currently the system registers individuals benefiting disability grants.

Setback and Challenges

- Financial constraints that impede the full implementation of the Persons with Disabilities Act 2018, the National Disability Plan of Action (ESNDPA) 2018-2022, and other programs aimed at improving the lives of all Emaswati by specifically addressing the various needs of women living with diverse disabilities. This setback further compromises the protection of PWD from all from of violence perpetrated against them.

¹¹⁶ Eswatini UPR 2021

2.6.2. Younger women

According to the 2017 Population and Housing Census the Kingdom of Eswatini has a young population age structure with about 75% of the population below 25 years and where children below the age 15 years account for about half of these. Compared to their male counterparts, young women in Eswatini face a wide range of challenges, including those related to physical safety, economic opportunity, and sexual and reproductive health, all of which have a detrimental effect on their long-term development. Particularly, adolescent girls experience challenges with their sexual and reproductive health, which can have serious repercussions. Many females in Eswatini become sexually active at a young age: some make their sexual debuts before the age of 15. This early sexual activity puts them at risk for unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, and other health complications.

The country's development framework emphasizes gender equality and equity of initiatives as cross cutting principles. These include the National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2023-2028, The National Strategic Framework on HIV 2024-2028, The National Development Plan 2023-2028 and many more. The Country has further increased STEM and TVET programs under the Ministry of Education, prioritize young women to provide them with equal opportunities for technical and vocational training, empowering them to pursue careers in traditionally male-dominated fields. This initiative aims to break down gender barriers and promote gender equality in the workforce. According to UNESCO, educating girls has huge societal impact, enhances women's agency and their decision-making, increases their living standards, has benefits for the health and nutrition of their children, can help to end child marriage and early and unintended pregnancy and ultimately increasing women's access to decent work and sparks economic development.

Challenges and Setbacks for Young women

- Gender-based violence that included domestic violence and sexual assault remains a pervasive issue in Eswatini mainly affecting young women as they find themselves in intergenerational relationships.
- The high unemployment rate among youth, exposes youth women to sex work as way of making income and ultimately increasing the risk of HIV and STIs. (Eswatini Gender Assessment on the HIV response 2024)

2.6.3. Window's Rights

Customs and practices vary widely across different communities and may include inheritance rights, property rights, sell of property and land and social status considerations.¹¹⁷ Widows may face stigma and discrimination within their communities, especially if they choose not to observe traditional mourning rituals or if their marital status affects their social standing. In many cases, widows may not inherit their late husband's property or may receive a smaller share compared to male heirs. Widows may experience social isolation or exclusion from community activities, impacting their mental well-being and sense of belonging.

The Government is in the process of reviewing the Marriage Bill and amend the Deeds Registry Act to ensure that women are equally treated. Currently, the Bill, similar to the Marriage Act (1963) still restricts marriage of widows or widowers with minor children. Such marriages should take place once the conditions of section 89 of the Administration of Estates Act has been met.¹¹⁸

The government and civil society organizations in Eswatini have conducted awareness campaigns and educational programs to inform widows about their rights under the amended laws. This includes providing information about inheritance rights, property ownership, and legal recourse available to widows. Advocacy efforts are ongoing to reform customary and statutory laws to better protect the rights of widows, including inheritance and property rights. The newly established Legal Aid Unit under the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs will work as an instrument to provide legal support to widow's in attaining their rights. The unit is currently not fully functional due to legislative processes but is receiving a high number of cases from women, especially widows seeking legal support on family and land issues.

¹¹⁷ ACTSA. Women's Rights in Swaziland. June2016

¹¹⁸ CANGO _ Analysis of the Marriage Bill, Administration of Estate Bill and Matrimonial Property Bill 2021, (Section 10 of the Bill) page 3-4

Setbacks and Challenges for Widow's Rights

- Widows often face difficulties in inheriting property and assets upon their husband's death. Traditional customs and patriarchal norms may prioritize male relatives or heirs over widows, leaving them economically vulnerable and without property rights.
- Widows in Eswatini face social stigma and discrimination associated with wearing the mourning gown, particularly in rural areas where traditional customs are strongly upheld
- There are gaps in legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms that protect widows' rights in Eswatini. The Legal Aid Unit has been established but there is still lack of awareness about existing laws or ineffective implementation can further hinder widows from accessing their rights

2.6.4. Effects of humanitarian crises on BPfA

The COVID-19 epidemic and the 2021 civil unrest in Eswatini had a significant impact on the country's socio-political environment, economy and social cohesiveness among other areas. As a result, the country was placed under complete lockdown, making it difficult for citizens to travel around freely and earn a living for their families. Livelihoods were disrupted by the turmoil, especially for women who work in the informal sector. According to the Impact Assessment of COVID-19 Report (2020) 81% of enterprises experienced medium to high level of financial impact to business operations due to the pandemic.¹¹⁹

Unemployment and economic hardships increased social inequalities and poverty. In the 2019-2022 Economic outlook provided by the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, economic growth declined from 2.4 percent in 2018 to 1.3 percent in 2019¹²⁰ due to a slowdown in economic activity in the primary and tertiary sectors of the economy and further affected by the unrest and COVID –19. Noting the looming economic contraction and potential negative spill overs this would have on different sectors of the economy, the Government of Eswatini developed the National Economic Recovery to save the economy, livelihoods and address the impacts of COVID-19. The National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) worked tirelessly to ensure the public was compliant, provided personal protective wear and provided food parcels to those who were in crisis as a result of the pandemic.

¹¹⁹ Impact Assessment of COVID-19 Report (2020)

¹²⁰ COVID-19 Recovery Strategy (2020)

2.7. Future Priorities for Accelerating Progress for Women and Girls

The Kingdom of Eswatini will effectively accelerate the women empowerment agenda and achieving gender equality by: increasing access to quality education, training and life-long learning for women and girls, ensuring access to affordable healthcare including SRH, poverty alleviation, agricultural productivity and food security, digital and financial inclusion, promoting economic empowerment through skills training and entrepreneurship opportunities, eliminating all forms of violence and ensuring equal representation in political and leadership positions.

At policy level, the country will implement and monitor progress in gender mainstreaming guided by the National Gender Policy 2023, significantly monitor progress on international treaties such as the agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, African Union Agenda 2063, CEDWA, SADCC protocol on Gender and development, UN Resolution 1325,60/2 and others.

The Government will collaborate with, private sector and civil society organizations to implement policies and programs that empower women economically, socially and politically. This strategy will promote inclusivity and equity through breaking down societal norms that perpetuate gender inequality by engaging men and boys. The initiative will further address intersectionality and recognize the unique challenges faced by women of different educational backgrounds, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and ability and provide mentorship for women to advance their careers. This holistic approach will not only benefit individuals, but also contribute to the overall development and prosperity of the country while breaking down systemic barriers and creating a more just society for all. The following are the country's future priorities for accelerating progress women and girls:

2.7.1. Quality education, training and life-long learning for women and girls

The Kingdom of Eswatini will continue to prioritize quality education (SDG 4) as part of the commitment to Sustainable Development Agenda 2023. Girls and women are acutely under-represented in these areas, which undermines the country's ability to fully develop all its human resource potential. The National Education Sector Analysis 2021 indicated that there is sustained gender parity in enrolment as a result of the Free Primary Education and other strategies implemented by the Ministry of Education. More strategies will be implemented to target girls in STEM and TVET programmes for women empowerment. The government is also working

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towards increasing access to education in rural areas to ensure all children have equal opportunities for learning. Partnerships with private sector organizations are being forged to enhance educational resources and infrastructure to create a more inclusive and effective education system for all students in the country.

Evidently, the education sector continues to get high budget allocations compared to health and social protection. Eswatini is committed to the Beijing Declaration to ensure that all citizens, especially women and girls have access to quality education and training opportunities to promote sustainable development in the country. This commitment is reflected in the government's ongoing efforts to improve educational infrastructure and enhance curriculum development. Furthermore, the government will continue to provide various scholarship programs and initiatives to increase access to education for marginalized groups and address disparities in education. The figure below shows the budget allocation for education, health and social protection by year:

Table 15: Eswatini budget allocation for Education, Health and Social protection by year (Addis Ababa Declaration on Population and Development Country Progress Report (ICPD@30)

| | 2019/20 | 2021/22 | 2023/24 |
|--------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Education | 15.1% | 14.4% | 16.6% |
| Health | 9.7% | 11.4% | 10.5% |
| Social Protection | 1.2% | 2.8% | 3.5% |

As indicated by various studies including the World Bank 2018b, 18% of girls drop out of junior secondary education because they become pregnant. Leaving school early is associated with a greater incidence of early sexual union and early and unintended pregnancy. The Education and Training Sector Policy 2018 allows for a girl child to remain in school even when they fall pregnant and there are ongoing campaigns to reduce teenage pregnancies. The Ministry of Education has further developed a strategy and guidelines to facilitate the reintegration of pregnant girls into schools. The SODV Act of 2018 states the legal age of consent to be 18 and protects young girls from engaging in early sexual debut resulting in early pregnancy. Life skills education is one of the key strategies the MoET has adopted to deal with the issues of pregnancy and other life adversities and help young people make better decisions. This approach provides education on positive behaviour, participation and personal fulfilment away from academics. The programme

includes HIV and aids education, menstrual health and hygiene for girls, conflict resolution, violence prevention and decision making. Schools have partnered with civil society organizations, the police and local health facilities to promote and educate on different thematic areas. Regardless of this robust framework to keep a girl child in school, some schools still see teenage pregnancy as taboo and girls remain at home without and underage pregnancy reported according to the SODV Act 2018.

“Amongst other reasons, the girl child drops out of school because of menstruation. Some cannot afford these sanitary pads; some even decide to stay at home because the school environment does not have proper sanitation. That is why they feel demotivated and end up not going to school”

To address the challenge of menstrual health for girls' civil society organizations and development partners celebrated the Menstrual Hygiene Day in 2023 with four schools from the community. This further extends to regular distribution of dignity packs in schools that addresses the issue of menstrual hygiene that affects girls in attending school. This action is not only taken by civil society but also the corporate sector has implemented CSI programmes that include sanitary pads donation, and the processes are coordinated through the Ministry of Education and the Deputy Prime Minister’s Office. In 2022, the country launched a public “Donate Sanitary Towels for Girls” Campaign and a number of corporates, individuals and other sectors donated towards the initiative as part of community service initiatives(CSI).¹²¹

The Ministry of Education has ensured that by policy, corporal punishment is not supported as it is not part of a teacher’s professional standards. The ministry promotes a culture of positive discipline that helps the children to take responsibility for making good decisions.¹²² This approach serves as a safeguarding principle not to promote any violent action that further exposes learners to trauma. The MoET has publicly made the nation aware of their stand through a publication in local newspaper (Eswatini Observer).¹²³

¹²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/seceswatini/photos/a.222467027882666/4676634842465840/?type=3>

¹²² UNICEF-SD-Education-Sector-Policy-report-2018

¹²³ <http://new.observer.org.sz/details.php?id=17350>

2.7.2. Poverty eradication, agricultural productivity and food security

As reported by UNECA MSMEs 2021 that majority of women are involved in informal operation of micro and small businesses, their contribution in employment creation and economy is limited by the size of their business. The support to women entrepreneurs is crucial to transform their employment creation given that female unemployment rate is 33% compared to 32.7% for males and 61.5% poverty rate and 65% among males.¹²⁴ The availability of the National Financial Inclusion Strategy will facilitate ease access to finances and women will formulate cooperatives to increase prospects of getting access to finance and markets. The Government is committed to continue ensuring equitable access to finance for MSMEs and providing support to women businesses and further creating quotas for women businesses to access finance, tenders and market opportunities. The Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Programmes 20005 was tailor made to end poverty by 2015 and its recommendations resulted in the establishment of the Poverty Reduction Fund, Regional Development Fund, Youth Enterprise and social grants for elderly, PWD and OVCs.

Women continue to be marginalized with limited access to land and agricultural inputs yet contributing 70% the agricultural workforce and produce 90% of all food in Eswatini.¹²⁵ The situation is increases by the poverty and unemployment levels amongst women. They are involved in various agricultural activities such as planting, weeding, harvesting, and post-harvest processing. This significantly contributes to food security in Eswatini by producing crops both for household and for sale in local markets. The Woman Farmer Foundation is a non-governmental organization that promotes active participation of Swazi women and youth in Agriculture and supporting women farmers by building capacity to women in agriculture to establish farming networks. This initiative has further established the Woman Farmer of the Year Competition which promotes entrepreneurship and participation of women in commercial food production and increases the esteem of women in the sector to explore business avenues and expand their agricultural productions. The Organization also provides mentorship programme for women farmers.

¹²⁴ Poverty Trends in Eswatini 2017

¹²⁵ Swaziland National Agricultural Investment Plan 2015

The Eswatini Water and Agricultural Development Enterprises Limited (ESWADE) continues and is committed to empower communities through providing technological framing. The Lusip Farmer Companies has a total of 61 Associations involved in sugarcane, vegetables and livestock farming with a total of 2301 farmers and 43% (994) being women.¹²⁶

Through various initiatives the country is committed to empower women in agriculture through training programmes, access to market and advocacy for their land rights. These efforts will not only enhance their livelihoods but also strengthen their resilience to economic adversities and climate change. Eswatini endorsed and domesticated the Sustainable Development Agenda 2023 and prioritized SDG 2 in an effort to end hunger among its citizens. The country collaborated with relevant stakeholders to develop the Eswatini Zero Hunger Strategic Review (EZHSR) 2019 to inform the implementation of SDG 1 and 2.

2.7.3. Eliminating violence against women and girls

The Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act of 2018 makes provision for all sexual offences and domestic violence, prevention and protection of all harm and acts of domestic violence. Regulations have been developed the implementation of the Act which includes the establishment of specific institutions to enhance the protection of women and children. The Government has further developed and is implementing the National Strategy to End Violence 2023-2027 which is in response to the realization of the lack of multisectoral framework that guides the prevention and response agenda of the country. The framework is instrumental in programming for prevention, social and behavioural change as well as protection of all vulnerable groups from violence. The National Strategy and Plan on Positive Parenting 2019-2023 seeks to instil principles that discourage violence and promote positive discipline to eliminate all forms of violence including those appearing as child discipline.

Eswatini undertook a study on the Drivers of Violence against Children in 2016. The study that violence against children in Eswatini is prevalent. This includes physical punishment and psychological oppression at (88%), sexual violence at (38%) bullying at (32%) physical violence from adults at (31%) and emotional violence (28.5%).¹²⁷ This comprehensive study on the drivers

¹²⁶ Eswatini Gender Profile 2022

¹²⁷ Drivers of Violence against Children, 2016

of violence against children identified five key drivers of violence: gender norms and inequality, economic and social policies that increase poverty and inequality, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, formal and informal systems that inhibit disclosure, family and community norms and secrets. This study has informed the country's strategies on the elimination of violence including the National Strategy to End Violence 2023. To further strengthen collaboration in the fight against gender-based violence, the Department of Gender and Family Issues has hosted the first GBV Symposium attended by diverse stakeholders to share data and discuss strategies for eliminating violence in a roundtable set up. The department has drawn recommendations from all sectors to strengthen the GBV response and explore other mechanisms at community and national levels.

To ensure comprehensive and quality service to survivors of violence the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiatives (REPSSI) and the University of Eswatini, Police Officers undertake a two-year part-time Certificate programme on psychosocial support. This programme will continue to provide capacity building to officers to ensure women have access to justice.

2.7.4. Access to affordable quality health care including SRH and rights

Eswatini has ensured universal health coverage for all as a priority of the Ministry of Health as stated in the Health Policy 2006. This policy enforces the health facilities provide health services to all citizens, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Over the years, health facilities have increased 327 and within an 8km radius. There is still a great demand to improve health programs especially targeting adolescent girls and young women to curb the HIV incidence. 190 facilities provide family planning services other facilities provide combination of prevention, hormonal and fertility treatment. Maternal and child health continues to be prioritized through policy and guidelines to integrated SRH. The Ministry of health continues to decentralize HIV prevention, treatment and care which currently contributes to over 90% coverage of ART and PMTCT services. Furthermore, the fight against Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) by the ministry of health has been given a strategic direction through the development of the 2016 NCDs policy which defines the country's action plan to minimize the consequences of these diseases. This process is further guided by the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases 2016-2020 which describes the interventions to prevent all NCDs.

2.7.5. Digital and financial inclusion for women

The country has made a commitment to accelerate and equitable financial inclusion action through the National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2023-2038 which emphasize women’s involvement in from informal to formal trade spaces to unlock economic potential, enhance resilience and contribute to the broader socioeconomic development goals. This will involve key strategies and considerations to address existing barriers and empower women economically. The Eswatini Communications Commission (ESCCOM) as the national regulator of digitalization and digital rights, is making progress in establishing community hubs that will ensure a widespread of access to affordable and reliable internet services and further strengthening mobile technology. This will involve infrastructure development in rural underserved communities where women face greater connectivity challenges.

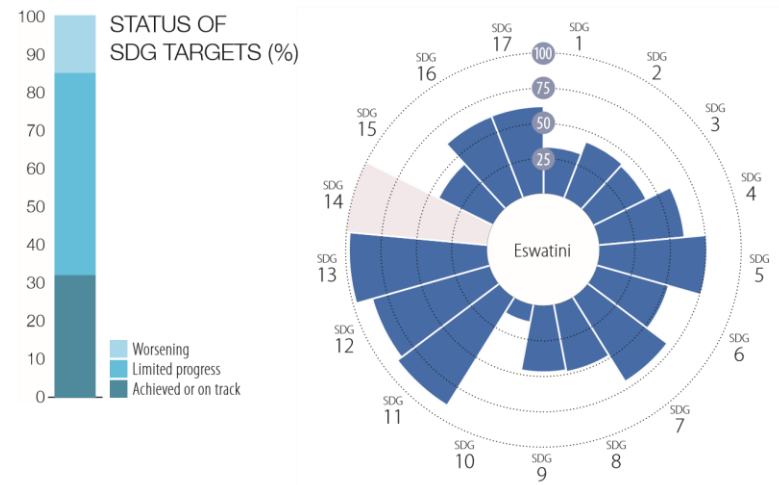
Section 3: Progress Across the 12 Critical Areas of Concern

This section describes the progress made across the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It provides information on policy and legal reform, institutional mechanism, programmes and initiatives that have enabled effective implementation of interventions geared towards women and girls. The progress details major achievements, challenges as well as strategies implemented by Eswatini for improvement with focus on the period of 2019–2024 including progress on Agenda 2030. The following figure shows Eswatini’s progress in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030:

OVERALL PERFORMANCE



AVERAGE PERFORMANCE BY SDG



SDG DASHBOARDS AND TRENDS

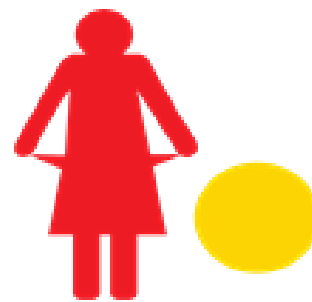
Figure 20: ESWATINI SDG Progress 2024 (SDG Transformation Center-Eswatini Profile)

As previously mentioned, Eswatini is committed promoting to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as part of its development agenda, as demonstrated by the building of an enabling legal, policy and strategic frameworks. The Eswatini Constitution (2005) protects women's human rights and freedoms. The government has further assured women's involvement in decision-making positions by appointing numerous line Ministries, departments, and other legislative institutions. The National Gender Policy 2023 prioritises women in national planning and strategic development frameworks.

I. Women and Poverty

Poverty Eradication

Eswatini like many other countries has notably high levels of poverty, often creating a greater challenge for women due to gender inequality in employment opportunities, education and access to resources. Traditional gender roles and systemic inequalities limit women's economic empowerment and their ability to break the cycle of poverty.



As reported by SHIES 2016/2017, rural residents, female-headed households, single-headed households, children, large families, the less educated, and the unemployed are the most prone to being poor. Since the country adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995 comprehensive strategies to promote gender equality and empower women have been implemented. Between 2019 and 2024 the country has made progress towards achieving SDG 1 (No Poverty). This includes the National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2023-2028 which states the importance of enhancing sustainable income to comprehensively address poverty and inequality in Eswatini. Eswatini has initiated programs aimed at increasing women's economic opportunities. This includes providing access to microfinance, training in entrepreneurship, and support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) provided by Government parastatals and other organizations. These programs help women start and grow their own businesses, which is key in addressing the issue of poverty. The country has invested in women's education and skills development through various STEM and TVET programmes that are targeting women. Civil society continues to engage communities in poverty alleviation and providing agricultural trainings and inputs for women to establish cooperatives and work together to produce for the market. partnership with international agencies and development partners has play a major role in mobilizing funding for women to establish businesses including renewable energy and environmental rehabilitation.

New York, 21 March 2024 - The Deputy Prime Minister's Office (DPMO) in partnership with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy (MNRE) convened an international discussion to mobilize support for Eswatini women in the energy sector. The official side event was held on the margins of the 68th Session on the Commission of the Status of Women (CSW) in New York, USA, on 21 March 2024. It was themed: Accelerating gender equality and women's economic empowerment through clean energy investment.

The country implements social assistance programmes under the Deputy Prime Minister's Office (DPMO) with a large number of beneficiaries nationwide. However, there is currently no universal social security coverage in Eswatini. A legal framework to establish a National Social Security Authority is being developed which will bring together social security schemes that operate in isolation. This will include Workmen's Compensation Insurance Fund, the National Insurance Fund, the National Pension Fund, the Motor Vehicle Accident Funds and the Social Welfare Fund.

Social Protection Services

The non-contributory social security system under the Deputy Prime Minister's Office (DPMO) caters for the elderly and disadvantaged individuals to obtain monthly grants. This category of people is entitled to basic health services at no cost in all public health institutions and hospitals. The DPMO continues to implement Free primary education since 2010 and a free school feeding scheme provided to all children of Eswatini in public schools. To ensure no child is left behind in accessing education, the Government provides education grants for orphaned and vulnerable children to pursue secondary education. Other initiatives like Tibiyo Takangwane and civil society organizations also support the Government in paying for education of a selected number of orphaned and vulnerable children.

Table 16: Deputy Prime Minister's Office Annual Report (GoE Estimate books (2017/18-20/2021))

| Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/System | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Indicator / Year | 2016/17 | 2020/21 |
| Number of beneficiaries under the OVC grant | 52,632 | 58,193 |
| Number of beneficiaries under elderly grant | 94,851 | 74,955 |
| Number of beneficiaries under disability grant | 4,779 | 5,019 |
| Government budget allocation for social protection programmes | | |

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| | | |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| Govt. budget allocation –OVC grant (E) | 108,034,458 | 190,000,000 |
| Govt. budget allocation- elderly grant (E) | 154,201,748 | 466,833,454 |
| Govt. Budget allocation- disability grant (E) | 1,123,920 | 28,708,000 |

As the country has experienced disasters over the last five years, two which were declared national emergencies (the COVID-19 pandemic and Tropical Cyclone Eloise). The Government provided resources to mitigate the impacts of their adverse events and saving thousands of lives. The Government established a COVID-19 ReLeaf Fund to provide aid to laid-off employees coordinated through the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. The Fund compensated a total of 23 099 employees (E400 per employee) from 155 companies.¹²⁸ Further, a socio-economic needs assessment was conducted to inform response and recovery plans. The Government made concerted efforts to coordinate a multisector comprehensive response through the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA). This included a COVID-19 relief program that saw over 300,000 vulnerable Emaswati receive this support in the form of cash transfers as well as food parcels distributed to the most vulnerable and hard-hit populations in Eswatini.

According to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Agricultural Rights (ICESCR) Report 2024, the total in food distribution to vulnerable populations amounted to 1,299.27 MT. This included a combination of Cereal (1,040 MT), Pulses (208 MT), and Vegetable Oil (52 MT). This intervention benefitted 9,296 households which had a total of 34,605 beneficiaries across all four regions of the country. Cash Based Transfers of E700 per household and Food parcels distributed were conducted for beneficiaries across all Tinkhundla in the country. More than 26,000 households benefitted from this intervention which were made up of 127558 beneficiaries. A total amount of E26 397 316 million was disbursed by the Government and partners in the reporting period.

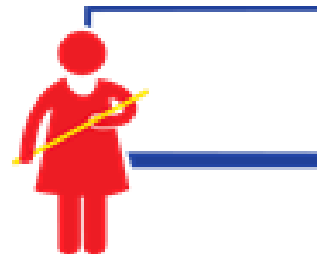
Setbacks and challenges in addressing Poverty

- Deeply ingrained cultural and traditional practices can limit women’s rights and opportunities.
- Gender norms can restrict women’s access to property, inheritance, and decision-making processes.

¹²⁸ Eswatini ICESCR Report 2024

II. Education and Training of women

As part of the sustainable development agenda, Eswatini has prioritized the education of women as an enabler for economic growth and sustainability. The country has conceptualized various interventions outlined in the Education and Training Sector Strategy which commits the country to providing equitable and inclusive education to all citizens



regardless of their socioeconomic stand or gender. The country has formalized and intensified Early Childhood Education (ECCDE) to prepare individuals to do better in their education. The 2017 population census indicates that 21.8% of children aged 3-6 years attend ECCDE and equal proportions of boys and girls do so. A higher proportion of children who reside in urban areas (28.3%) attend ECCDE than those who are rurally based (20.3%). There are still huge data gaps at this level because it's largely in private hands and not all such centres are formally known and registered. The introduction of free primary education (FPE) in 2021 and the Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Fund which provides financial support to children in difficult circumstances in higher educations has increased the enrolment rate and provided girls and boys the opportunity to be in school and receive good quality basic education.

In Eswatini, tertiary education is delivered through various training institutions including universities, technical and vocational colleges, teacher and nursing colleges and business colleges with the purpose of providing training programmes that are in line with demands of the technologically driven labour market. Although limited, the Government continues to provide scholarships to qualifying students within the country and in other international universities.

In accordance with Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063, and in acknowledgment of the vital role that science and technology play in propelling the expansion of knowledge-based, technology-driven economies, the NDP advocates for the integration of science and technology at every level of the educational system. Eswatini hasn't made much progress in this area due to a lack of infrastructure and equipment, among other things, and challenges finding qualified instructors of science and math and information technology (IT). There is currently a low enrolment rate in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) programs at educational institutions, particularly for

women and girls. The country in implementing various programs through CSOs and Development Partners to promote STEM amongst women.

Setbacks and Challenges

- Women still make a lower percentage of students enrolled in STEM programmes due to social norms that marginalize women.
- Girls do not remain in school after falling pregnant although the Education Sector Strategy guarantees that girls should remain in even after they fall pregnant.

III. Women and Health

Access to quality health services for women and girls

As a part of the national development agenda providing quality health is a priority. It is guaranteed by the constitution in Section 60(8) as a fundamental human right. The majority of HIV clinical services in the country are delivered by Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini, which also funds ARVs for adults. The National Sexual Reproductive Health Policy and the rest of the health sector policy framework are grounded on the fundamental idea that all citizens have a right to health care, regardless of their gender, culture, religion, age, race, or socioeconomic standing. The prevention and eradication of communicable and non-communicable diseases, maternal and child health, adolescent sexual and reproductive health, and the strengthening of health systems are the main theme areas of the health pillar.



Family Planning and meeting the need for Contraceptives

Between 2014 and 2021–2022, the percentage of unmet family planning needs rose from 15.2% to 20.4%. Commodity stock-outs of various forms of contraception are the primary contributing reason. Eswatini has struggled with the shortage of necessary medications and supplies, particularly those related to reproductive health, over the last two to three years. COVID-19 also made matters worse by interfering with the adoption of services. As a result, the CPR using

contemporary techniques decreased by 8 percentage points, or from 65.5% in 2014 to 57% in 2021–2022.¹²⁹

Women and HIV

Eswatini is among the first countries to achieve the 95-95-95 UNAIDS Target. The response to HIV and AIDS is guided by the National Multi-sectoral HIV and AIDS Policy which has amongst its guiding principles, human rights, gender equality and equity. With this progress made, the HIV incidence is relatively among 15-49 females is at 19.9 and 9.9 respectively per 1000 population compared to 17 and 10.2 respectively per 1000 population among males. To close this gap, the country is implementing AGYW targeted programmes to provide comprehensive sexuality education, HIV testing, treatment and care. Regardless of these programmes, the perceptions by young people are that health facilities remain user unfriendly and therefore a deterrent in the uptake of SRH services by young people.

The Eswatini PMTCT program continued to demonstrate high performance in the key PMTCT indicators. This is achieved through maintaining high levels of awareness of the HIV status at the first antenatal care visit (ANC1), high ART coverage among pregnant women living with HIV, high proxy early infant diagnosis (EID) coverage and low mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) rates.

Eswatini has made great strides in reducing the burden of TB from 1,590 cases per 100,000 people in 2010 to 348 cases per 100,000 people in 2022.¹³⁰ Although symptom-based screening has remained as the gateway to TB services, new diagnostics approaches have been adopted and treatment options have also matched the current global best practices for both drug sensitive and drug-resistant TB. HIV testing for TB patients has remained at 100 percent and more than 97 percent of TB/HIV co-infected patients receive ART.

¹²⁹ MEPD, MICS Report 2010, 2014 and 2021-22

¹³⁰ Country Operation Plan (COP) 2023

Interventions to address non-communicable Diseases (NCDs)

The Government of Eswatini recognized the importance of systematic screening of NCDs such as hypertension, diabetes, and mental health in addition to cervical cancer screening for women. As outlined in the Country Operation Plan (COP) 2023 the Ministry of Eswatini has made a commitment to work with other partners and funding streams such as PEPFAR, Global Fund, WHO and World Bank to cover existing gaps in equipment, testing, training, and treatment needs for. The country has established a cancer registry system as part of the National Cancer Prevention and Control Strategy developed in 2019 and will continue to implement an equitable evidence-based intervention for prevention, early detection, treatment and care through the National Cancer Control Unit. Through the Phalala Fund, the Ministry of Health refers cancer patient to local private hospitals like the Eswatini Cancer Care and in South Africa.

Gender responsive budgeting for Health

The Government of Eswatini allocates about a tenth of its national budget to health. For the current financial year i.e. 2022/23-2023/24.¹³¹ This allocation demonstrates the government's commitment to improving healthcare services and ensuring the well-being of its citizens. The increased budget will likely result in expanded healthcare infrastructure and improved access to medical services for all residents of Eswatini.

Setbacks and Challenges in Women and Health

- Stock out of Family Planning and PrEP Commodities and NCD Medical supplies in the country.
- The country currently has no mental health strategy and only one institution which carries stigma for being known as the hospital for "mad" people.
- There is high HIV incidence and prevalence among adolescents and young women due to intergenerational relationships and other social factors that exposes young. The Ministry of Health is working with civil society organizations is implementing programmes to improve access to HIV testing, PrEP, ART and support.
- 13 % of TB patients still die from TB, no significant change in reducing mortality.

¹³¹ Eswatini Government

IV. Violence Against Women

The country adopted the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act in 2018 which works as a protection instrument and has various provisions for all genders. This Law provides a gender-neutral definition of rape. The country developed and is implementing a National Strategy and Action Plan to End Violence 2023 –2027 that outlines strategic areas of intervention to end violence using a multisector approach to guide the prevention and response agenda. The SODV Act was simplified and interpreted in the local language SiSwati. The Department of Gender and Family Issues (DGFI) is spearheading multiple initiatives on ending GBV which include the development of a National Gender Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS), to greatly improve the systematic collection and compilation of GBV data from all partners to a central point (Coordination level). This system is envisaged to increase effective data collection and analysis to inform GBV programming. The DGFI has also initiated the process of establishing the Sexual Offenders Register as provided by the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act 2018.



GBV related research

In 2021 through civil society, the country conducted a study on The Drivers of Intimate Violence. The findings from the study show that the four main drivers of intimate partner violence are socialization, globalization, governing bodies and institutions at all levels and individual behaviour. As the country has an obligation to CEDWA, study has informed the national strategy to end violence with key imperative interventions that address social norms and attitudes at community level.

Eswatini has taken steps to reduce violence against girls through the Violence Against Children Survey (VACS 2022) Organizations like SWAGAA, Kwakha Indvodza and may other are actively working address gender stereotypes, social norms to end violence. There is focus on ensuring that people with disabilities have equal rights. However, despite these efforts, LGBTQI+ persons, female sex workers and other vulnerable groups still report high levels of violence, abuse and stigma as stated in the 2019 Eswatini Stigma Index.

Protection on Survivors of Violence

Various stakeholders within Government and Civil Society Organizations provide counselling services to survivors of gender-based violence. The Government has also established a One-Stop Centre as a strategy to deal with secondary trauma. The services provided under this platform include police services, social welfare services, and medical and psychological services. Plans to roll out the One-Stop Centres in all four regions of the country are at an advanced stage. Children who have survived violence and those who require protection are placed in alternative care or temporarily at the halfway house. Due to the lack of halfway or safe houses, women survivors are accommodated by relatives.

GBV awareness raising and advocacy

The Government and other partners have increased GBV awareness raising through weekly radio programs such as *Tenhlalakahle* (“welfare”) under Social Welfare and *Ingungu Yematsemba* (“beacon of hope”) under SWAGAA, MoET live program on EBIS 2, World Vision on VOC, NATICC on VOC FM, as well as *Emaphoyisa Nesive* (“the people and the police”); *Nawe Uliphoyisa* (“you too are a police”) by Royal Eswatini Police Services. The Department of Gender and Family issues has rolled outreach awareness raising programmes at the town bus ranks and the initiative is intensified every year during the 16 Day of Activism Against GBV. This programme includes the public education programs to combat domestic violence and disseminate information regarding sexual offences in the local language.

Setback and Challenges in Women and Violence

- The rate of violence especially gender-based violence has increased in Eswatini. 66 % of GBV survivors in Eswatini are women and 34% are men and most of these cases happen at home are perpetrator by someone known to the survivor.
- The GBV case management system is manual and does not utilize a GBV case unique identifier for each reported abuse case from a survivor, double counting remains a threat as survivors tend to move across service providers.
- The delays in process for the establishment of the national Sexual Offenders Register (Section 56 of the SODV Act) as a national strategy for protecting citizens especially women and children.

V. Women and armed conflict

Eswatini is making efforts to build peaceful and inclusive societies through various initiatives aimed to promoting social cohesion and reducing conflict. The country is focusing on community-based approaches to address issues such as violence, discrimination and exclusion. One key strategy is promoting dialogue and reconciliation processes that involve diverse community members, including women and marginalized groups. Evidently, His Majesty King Mswati III commissioned the National People’s Parliament “*Sibaya*” before the 2023 elections, to engage citizens on national issues, including women’s role peace and reconciliation. The Southern African Women in Peace and Development played a major role in advocating for peace building in Eswatini and the efforts were successful in engaging relevant stakeholders in the Peace Building agenda.



Through civil society organizations, capacity building trainings were conducted in the four regions of the country and reaching 220 women leaders at community level. Over 36,000 women and girls were directly reached with advocacy events, civic education and dialogues.¹³² The initiative further engaged in discussions with SADC on the Women, Peace and Security initiative conducted. The project successfully amplified and coordinated the voices of women in the peacebuilding process including conflict management and negotiation.

The Government of Eswatini is engaged in efforts to develop its national action plan on WPS as required by UN resolution 1325. This included training of Government officials in 2023 with SADC on international and regional frameworks on WPS as well as processes to be followed in developing NAP. Female uniformed armed forces and other government role players were also trained on peacekeeping to develop a peacekeeping and mediator unit which can be deployed to respond to conflict.

¹³² Women Unlimited 2022
<https://womenunlimited.africa/project/amplifying-womens-voices-in-peace-making-processes-in-eswatini/>

Setbacks and Challenges

- Political instability as a result of the 2021 civil unrest exacerbated the vulnerabilities of women to violence, displacement and exploitation. This further resulted in loss of livelihoods and led to economic hardships.
- The trauma of conflict led to severe psychological impacts on women, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety.
- There is currently limited access to mental health services in Eswatini, quality service comes at a cost.

VI. Women and the Economy

Targeted Employment Programmes

The Kingdom of Eswatini has invested in education and skills training tailored to the needs of women is essential. This includes vocational training programs that equip women with market-relevant skills, as well as initiatives to encourage girls' education in STEM fields and other traditionally male-dominated sectors. To address the issue of the high unemployment rates, the Government established Vocational Training and Rehabilitation Services Unit (VTRS) under the Directorate of the Industrial and Vocational Training Department in the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. The Unit mainly focuses on empowering PWD with appropriate skills to become economically productive. With the training offered in vocational institutions, it is envisaged that the trainees will achieve self-sustainability through formal employment in the industry. The unit further helps integrate the trainees into society to start income generation projects.



The vocational training and rehabilitation services through the Ministry of Tinkhundla Administration, offer skills training programmes in manual activities such as sewing, food processing and business management among others. These trainings mainly target women, the youth and other disadvantages groups living in rural areas. As a result of this programme, five training Centres have been established in rural areas such as Mahlangatja, Sithobela, Mahamba, Siphofaneni and Ntfontjeni. The Ministry of Agriculture through the Extension Officers also train women on various programmes such as farming, animal husbandry and soap making.

The Eswatini Youth Empowerment Programme (EYEP) is an initiative supported by the UNDP in partnership with the Government, private sector, tertiary institution and civil society to support graduates to gain work experience and skills while earning a monthly stipend. This programme was endorsed by Cabinet in 2022 and launched in November 2022. In 2023 300 graduates were deployed for the first year of piloting. With about 4000 graduates per year with less than half being absorbed due to the high unemployment rate, EYEP aims to support the graduates access jobs. Over 70 organizations across the private sector, government institutions, parastatals, UN Agencies, SMEs and NGOs benefitted from working with young, dynamic and talented graduates who helped to grow their organizations.

The programme does not focus on graduates only but has the Artisan Skills Training and Mentorship programmes provides non-graduates and out of school youth to provide them with basic vocational skills. The youth acquire skills in sewing, upholstery, electrical installation, plumbing, metal work and building and construction.

In an effort to advance women in trade and applying a gender perspective in business, on the 17-19 July 2024 the International Trade Centre (ICT)'S SheTrades Initiative, in collaboration with the Ministry of Trade and the Deputy Prime Minister's Office with support from the European Union hosted a three full-day workshops for women.¹³³ The workshops targeting women business led organizations, business support organizations, government and CSOs with the aim to enhance the effectiveness of existing support services by integrating a gender perspective. The mission revealed that women-led Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs), including women farmers, encounter numerous gender-specific barriers in Eswatini's agricultural sector. Key barriers hindering women's potential in agriculture include limited access to productive land, markets, and credit. Through this workshop included training sessions on emotional intelligence, leadership skills and pitching and negotiation in the business sector. As part of the ongoing efforts to influence gender mainstreaming in trade policies, a series of sector-specific training workshops for 50 Women-Led Businesses (WLBs) in Eswatini will be held from August 14 to 15, 2024. These

¹³³ International Trade Centre SheTrades Workshop Report 2024

will be focused on global consumer trends for 2024-2025, understanding customer segments, developing detailed customer profiles, and building support networks.

Measures to facilitate re-employment of workers

The country has not, as yet, established measures specifically directed towards the re-employment of retrenched workers. However, retrenched workers are also eligible to benefit from any of the available Funds established to provide capital investments towards the establishment of small/medium businesses. The private sector provides training for employees on managing after retrenchment and retirement.

Work on informal sector

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Trade engaged in discussion on the size, dynamics and extent of the informal sector. This will provide strategic direction on strategies to best manage and regulate the sector without transforming into a formal economy. Some of the initiatives undertaken by the country to promote the development of small and medium enterprises include

- **The Small Enterprises Development Company (SEDCO)** - is a public enterprise that was established in 1970 to create, develop, and promote Small, Micro, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
- **Export Credit Guarantee Scheme (ECGS)** - it promotes the country's export trade. The scheme was placed under the Central Bank of Eswatini for administration purposes.
- **The Small-Scale Enterprise Loan Guarantee Scheme (SSELGS)** - is designed to cover shortage or lack of other acceptable collateral for credit to small-scale enterprises.
- **E45 Million Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) Revolving Relief Fund** – This fund was established in February 2021 to provide easily accessible finance to cater for the operating expenses of MSMEs, both formal and informal, which have been affected by COVID-19.
- **The Informal Traders Revolving Fund** was established in 2018 to provide loan facilities to informal traders with loans of up to E5,000 payable within a year at an interest rate not exceeding one percent. This fund is being managed by the Eswatini Development Finance Corporation (FINCORP).

- **With support from COMESA**, the Government constructed the Manzini Trade Hub (*Inhlanganisela yaboMake*) to provide a decent shelter for informal women traders that previously occupied the Manzini Satellite Bus Rank, an initiative that had the full support of Her Majesty the Indlovukazi (Queen Mother).
- **Youth Enterprise Revolving Fund** is an initiative aimed at promoting youth entrepreneurship and economic empowerment in Eswatini. The fund provides financial assistance to young entrepreneurs to help them start or grow their businesses. This capital initiative is equitably accessed by young people between 18 and 35 with a viable business plan.
- **Rural Development Fund** supports development projects in rural communities to improve standard of living and enhance infrastructure. This includes agricultural development, health and community-based projects.
- **Junior Achievement** is a school-based initiative that aims at fostering entrepreneurship and business skills among young people. JA Eswatini inspires and prepares young people to succeed in a global economy by providing educational programs that focus on financial literacy, work readiness, and entrepreneurship.
- **Young Heroes** implements a project that alleviates poverty by assisting female caregivers of OVCs to become financially literate and become micro entrepreneurs

National Minimum Wage

Eswatini enacted the Wages Act No. 16 of 1964 which establishes eighteen (18) tripartite Wages Councils for each industry or sector of the economy. These Wages Councils are tasked with the responsibility of annually reviewing the sectoral Wages Regulations Orders and promulgating revised minimum wages and basic conditions of service for each particular sector. For instance, in 2023 most of the Wages Councils reviewed the minimum wages and basic conditions of service for their respective sectors. Eswatini does not have a standard national minimum wage.

Equal pay for equal value

Eswatini is committed to fostering equality by eliminating all forms of discrimination between men and women following international labour instruments like the Convention No. 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation), 1958 (ratified 5 June 1981), Convention 100 on

Equal Remuneration, 1951 (ratified on 5 June 1981). These international labour standards are part of the (8) Core Conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in respect of which all member states should all respect, promote and realize. This requirement is according to the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work as duly adopted by the ILO in 1998.¹³⁴

Measures to Prevent Sexual Harassment in the workplace

The country prohibits and criminalizes sexual harassment in the workplace and has adopted legislation to that effect. The Code of Good Practice: Employment Discrimination (promulgated under Section 109 of the Industrial Relations Act), Clause 3 thereof, whilst referring to Section 29 of the Employment Act, classifies harassment of an employee, whether of a sexual nature or otherwise, as constituting a form of discrimination. Moreover, the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act No. 15 of 2018 (section 48) explicitly criminalizes sexual harassment¹³⁵ and offenders are liable to prosecution, conviction, and punishment of ten years imprisonment or a fine not exceeding Twenty-Five thousand Emalangeni or both. There are no available statistics of sexual harassment cases reported through the Labour Inspectorate.

However, The Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration Commission (CMAC) data suggest that several sexual harassment and workplace bullying incidents go unreported as there are no workplace policies that deal with sexual harassment and bullying. In some cases, employees are not aware of what harassment entails. The private sector has increased efforts to provide training to employees on sexual harassment and workplace bullying as part of the wellness programmes.

Setbacks and Challenges

- There is lack of access to capital which hinders the growth and success of women-owned businesses as most women are in informal sector. This lack of access to capital is often compounded by limited educational opportunities and cultural barriers that prevent women from fully participating in the formal economy.
- Care responsibilities are unpaid and the burden of care falls on women in most families.

¹³⁴ Eswatini CESRC Report 2024

¹³⁵ Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act 2018 Section 48

VII. Women in Power and Decision Making

The Government enacted the Election into House of Assembly Act in 2018 which gives effect to Section 86 and 95 of the 2005 National Constitution stating that female members of parliament are less than 30% quarter provided by the constitution, the house shall elect more than four women on regional basis in accordance with the provision of Section 95.



In 2018, to encourage the participation of women in politics and decision-making, the Elections and Boundaries Commission in collaboration with the Department of Gender and Family Issues and CSOs conducted civic education programmes aimed at advocating for the election of women. These initiatives did not yield optimum results as three percent of the elected Members of Parliament (MPs) were women. There have been continuous advocacy initiatives on promoting women's participation in politics in readiness for the national elections in 2023, which resulted in the eleven percent improvement of women elected for MP positions, and about ten percent regression in *indvuna yenkhundla* (Constituency heads). The Government has appointed women in various ministries and Minister and Principal Secretaries and a first female Deputy Prime Minister.

Eswatini needs to continue implementing this quota system and implement affirmative action measures that ensure a certain percentage of political positions are reserved for women. Continue provide training and capacity-building programs for women interested in politics and leadership roles without waiting from elections. To address discriminatory practices and stereotypes that hinder women's political participation the country needs to rollout awareness campaigns through community dialogues and media to challenge stereotypes and promote a more inclusive political culture. There is need to commit to create an enabling environment for women through governance structures that are accountable and gender-responsive

Setbacks and Challenges

- Although the Government of Eswatini has developed strategies and quotas to ensure women participate and are elected to hold decision making positions, the deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that often prioritize male leadership and decision-making roles. Traditional beliefs and practices influence voter's decisions and limit women's participation in the political space.
- The Government has provided voter education to communities and rolling out campaigns to promote the nomination of women into positions of leadership but the percentage of women in parliament is still below 30%.

VIII. Institutional Mechanisms for Gender Equality

The Department of Gender and Family Issues has continued to coordinate the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda in Eswatini since appointment. The Department further plays a major role in ensuring that gender mainstreaming is implemented and guided by the National Gender Policy 2023. This institution further ensures that



national strategies in the fight against gender-based violence is coordinated. The DGFI further functions through the Gender Consortium which is formed by civil society organization under the Coordinating Assembly of Non-Governmental Organizations. Since the appointment, the DGFI has successfully coordinated the gender equality agenda, regardless of budget limitations that has been addressed by partnerships with different development partners.

The Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) is a structure that encourages women parliamentarians to embrace their uniqueness as it is the very essence that will bring positive and productive contribution towards formulating strategies that will push the country forwards. The WPC was officially opened in 2024 after the 2023 election, welcoming new members and as a platform for strategic planning and capacity building. The caucus aims to address gender inequality in decision-making processes and advocate for policies that promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Through collaboration and support from development partners, the WPC seeks to amplify the voices of women in parliament, create a more inclusive and representative government, championing the rights and interests of women and ultimately leading to a more progressive and inclusive legislative agenda.

Setbacks and Challenges

- Inadequate human and financial resources in the Department of Gender and Family Issues to effectively mainstream gender programmes in the country. This challenge impacts on monitoring and reporting on gender programmes at national and international level.
- The establishment of institutional mechanisms to promote gender equality, such as the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs and the Human Rights Commission, has been a positive step. However, these institutions often lack the necessary resources and capacity to carry out their mandates effectively. There is a need for better coordination and stronger accountability mechanisms to ensure that gender equality initiatives are implemented and monitored effectively (Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, 2022).
- Lack of joint programming in implementing gender activities within the UN Gender Theme Group (Eswatini Gender Profile)

IX. Human Rights of Women

The Eswatini government has made significant progress in advancing and defending women's human rights in the country, the region and through broader international commitment. The constitution and other legislative documents uphold the fundamental rights of women and men, including the elimination of gender and sexual discrimination. The following tools, among others, made it possible for women to actively participate in the political, social, and economic facets of the country's development:¹³⁶



1. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948
2. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDWA) 1979
3. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), 1984

The Eswatini Commission of Human Rights and Public Administration protects human rights and ensures equitable access to public services for all and leadership that is accountable to all people. The commission was appointed by His Majesty King Mswati III on the advance of Judiciary Commission through legal notice no.143/2009. The CHRPA has three-fold functions: Human

¹³⁶ Eswatini Common Core

Rights, Public Administration and Integrity. In collaboration with the National Mechanism for Reporting and Feedback (NMRF) in discussing human rights issues that relate to the citizens including access to justice for PWD and women. The NMRF further develops work plans that are shared with the Government and other key stakeholders integrating all recommendations from treaty bodies using a progressive realization approach.

As demonstrated across other critical areas of concerns, women in Eswatini continue to enjoy their fundamental human rights such as access to quality education and health care services, participation in productive economic activities, participation in positions of power and participation in decision-making and the country has created legal frameworks and strategies to protect women from all forms of violence. The establishment of the Legal Aid Unit is a significant move to make sure that women have access to justice. Nevertheless, the unit is currently providing legal advice and not representing women in court due to ongoing legislative processes within the Ministry of Justice.

The 2020 Correctional Services Regulations assertively guarantee the right to privacy for female inmates in correctional facilities by mandating the separation of male and female offenders. Female officers hold exclusive access to the female quarters, and any male officer entering the female section must be accompanied by a female officer.¹³⁷ Furthermore, the correctional services ensure that female offenders receive necessary hygiene materials, including sanitary towels. This measure aims to uphold the dignity and well-being of female inmates during their time in correctional facilities, reflecting a commitment to gender-sensitive policies that prioritize the needs and rights of women in the criminal justice system. The regulations further allow incarcerated women probation parole, and it informs the establishment of a women's network and gender forum within the department.

-
1. ¹³⁷ (1) Where separate parts of the correctional facility are available for the reception of both males and female offenders, the following requirements, in addition to those contained in section 70 of the Act, shall be strictly observed.
 2. (a) the locks of the doors and gates of the male section shall be such that the keys to the locks of the doors and gates of the female section do not fit the locks of the doors and gates of male section and vice versa.

Setbacks and Challenges in advancing Women Human Rights

- Lack of synergies between lapsing and incoming strategies resulting in non-continuity of resource streams, no lessons learnt & improvement.
- There is a difficulty in implementing some of the correction services regulation imperatives due to insufficient budget.
- The Legal Aid Unit is currently unable to offer legal representation due to pending legislative processes, the Legal Aid Bill and Legal Practitioner Bill is currently being amended.

X. Women and the Media

Eswatini recognises that to achieve gender equality, rigid attitudes and behaviours around gender need to keep changing. This means challenging stereotypes that limit how people behave, are perceived and are treated at work, at school, in relationships, in their homes, online and by their communities. Media plays an important role in setting and upholding societal examples and the portrayal of women and girls. Women contribute to a range of media platforms in Eswatini including national radio, (EBIS 1 and 2), television (Eswatini TV and Channel Yema Swati), print (Times of Eswatini and Eswatini Observer) and online media. This representation brings diverse perspectives and highlights issues pertinent to women and marginalized communities. The country continues to improve gender parity and support women in the media sector. The Eswatini government has further created laws, policies, plans, and initiatives to assist practitioners in using media freedom. Working with civil society, the Government has trained editors and journalists on the importance of accurate reporting especially when reporting GBV stories and the publication of information that may be violating women's rights. In 2022, the Coordinating Assembly of Non-Governmental Organizations (CANGO) trained journalists and editors on GBV reporting.



According to the World Bank 2022 the female rate of cell phone use in Eswatini is higher than both Sub-Saharan Africa and the lower middle-income group. This enables women to explore social media and have platforms for free expression. The country enacted the Computer Crimes and Cyber Crimes Act of 2022 to ensure that internet users are protected from cyberbullying and other forms of human rights violation.

XI. Women and Environment

Environmental Protection of Human settlements

The Human Settlements Authority Act of 1988 (as amended) ensures that human settlements are developed sustainably. This Act compels any person desirous of developing a human settlement to adhere to standards set by the Eswatini Environment Authority,¹³⁸ which regulates and provides specifications on the considerations to be taken when constructing human settlement structures.



Conservation, Protection and rehabilitation

The policy frameworks on environmental and natural resources management have gender considered gender such as the Swaziland National Climate Policy of 2016 and National Water Policy 2018 which incorporates gender mainstreaming as a response to the government's recognition that protecting the environment and natural resources requires gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.¹³⁹ The policy recognizes that women are disproportionately affected by climate change and that they rely on the environment for their livelihood. Women also possess invaluable knowledge about the management of natural resources, which can be applied to strategies for disaster relief, mitigation, and climate adaptation.

Efforts has been made to involve women and youth in land rehabilitation projects under the Environmental Authority, this includes recycling, tree planting and other initiatives. The overarching mission is to ensure that Eswatini's development is environmentally, economically and socially sustainable through various frameworks and legislation that promotes the sustainability and management of natural resources

¹³⁸ Established in terms of the Environment Management Act of 2002

¹³⁹ Eswatini Gender Profile 2022

The Kingdom of Eswatini Country Progress Report on the
Implementation Of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – July 2024

Table 17: Eswatini Community Environmental Conservation Projects (Eswatini Environmental Authority)

| Project140 | Mandate |
|--|--|
| Sankolweni Project | This is project is presented as a wetland management project, but covers three priority areas of the Fund: Sustainable Land Management; Sustainable Water Management; and Ecosystems, Habitat and Biodiversity Conservation |
| Bhidlilili Wetland Project | This is a project that is proposed by WVE, which is a huge wetland that is ranked no. 2 in Eswatini in terms of size. |
| Lusitini Land Rehabilitation Project | This is a donga project that is supported by ESWADE who has a running land rehabilitation project in other parts of the same community where they also impact skills on mechanical donga rehabilitation. |
| Yonge Nawe Land Rehabilitation Project | This is a donga project located next to the Manzini-Nhlangano main road at Nkwene Area, which has the support of ESWADE |
| Nkabeni Donga rehabilitation Project | There is real and extensive erosion caused by surface run-off water that has started to damage the Madlangempisi-Tshaneni tar road at the Mabiya junction |
| U-Tech’s Education for Sustainable Development Goals | This is a climate change project, proposed by one of the leading schools in the Lubombo region. This presents an opportunity to use U-Tech as a pioneer school in teaching climate change concepts. Also, it can be used as a centre of excellence for surrounding schools and the entire Lubombo region, where practical learning can be facilitated for the entire region. |

UNDP and the Ministry of Tourism and Environmental Affairs on 25 November 2020 launched the “*Phatsa Sakho Nawe*” Campaign aiming towards a plastic free Eswatini and advocacy initiative to reduce single use plastic bags in Eswatini. Contributing to SDGs 12,13, 14 and 15, the campaign is a response to the waste challenge posed by single use plastic bags on the environment. *Phatsa Sakho Nawe* means “bring your own bag”. Research shows that Eswatini, utilizes approximately 1,790,000 free single use plastic bags per month, through 3 of the largest retail

¹⁴⁰ <https://eea.org.sz/eswatini-environment-fund/>

franchises in the country. This campaign has further enabled women in the informal sector to make and sell reusable shopping bags for income generation.

Setbacks and Challenges

- Women, particularly those in rural areas, are more exposed to environmental hazards such as smoke from cooking fires and contaminated water, which can lead to health issues like respiratory problems and waterborne diseases.
- Effective environmental policies often lack a gender perspective and women still have limited access to land.

XII. The Girl Child

Children make up 40% of the Kingdom of Eswatini's population, and they are the country's future, as expressed in the local language *Umliba loya embile*. As stated in the Positive Parenting Strategy 2023-2027, the government of Eswatini recognized the challenges faced by the girl child and has included the girl child population among the venerable groups.



The Eswatini Legal Framework provides protection to the girl child. This includes the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act of 2018 which explicitly states the age of sexual consent to be 18 years. Furthermore, protection is further strengthened by the implementation of the Child Protection and Welfare Policy which protects the freedom of a child and the Disability Act 2001. Despite the legislative and programmatic efforts, challenges faced by the girl child are persistent. The Civil Registration Act of 2024 has been passed by parliament and fully enacted into law. This act will address several complex cases regarding registration of children. The Positive Parenting Strategy 2023 - 2027 builds on other national policies and strengthens the country's commitment in providing a guideline for a holistic child development by empowering and supporting parents and enabling progressive realization of the rights of children.

Globally 22% of adolescents aged 15-19 are not educated, employed or training compared to 12% of boys of the same age

The impact of COVID-19 has proven such and has exacerbated inequality between the boy and the girl child, For Example: more female students could not return to school post COVID-19 due to teenage pregnancy. An increase in gender-based violence perpetrated against girls was noted during the same period.

In September 2023, Eswatini launched the Violence Against Children and Youth Survey (VACS) 2022 which presents data violence experiences. The VACs allowed the opportunity to measure progress made since the first VACS, identifying emerging shifts in violence against children and evaluate ongoing efforts and identifying opportunities to create safer communities for every child, adolescent and youth. The study provided national prevalence of physical, emotional and sexual violence perpetrated against children and youth. Through VACS, the country was able to identify risk and protection factors to inform stakeholders and guide national prevention efforts. The Deputy Prime Minister's Office through National Children Services Department has launched the national child line which focuses on reporting violence against children and referral of cases.

Setbacks and Challenges

- Limited capacity of the DGFI to coordinate the implementation of the positive parenting strategy (human and other resources)
- Poverty exposes the girl child to intergenerational relationships and early sexual debut resulting in teenage pregnancy and HIV acquisition.
- Misunderstanding, mis-information, mis-interpretation of SODV and CRC by parents.

Stakeholder consultation on the 12 critical Areas of concern

Key stakeholders were engaged to contribute to the preparation of the report with the aim of collecting primary data from diverse sectors. An online survey on the Eswatini Beijing+30 National Progress Report was sent to over 60 participants from various sectors, yielded responses from 19 key partners. These included UNFPA, Phumelela Project, the Council of Swaziland Churches, Health Plus 4 Men, His Majesty's Correctional Services (Eswatini), Women Unlimited, WOMEN UNLIMITED ESWATINI, Women in Trade and Development (WITAD), the Ministry of Health, Federation of Organizations for Persons with Disabilities (FODSWA), Eswatini Sexual and Gender Minorities (ESGM), NERCHA, UNICEF, Bantwana Initiative Eswatini, UNDP, NAMBOARD, Family Life Association of Eswatini (FLAS) and CANGO. These participants represent a broad spectrum of implementers, activists, and decision-makers whose insights are crucial for informing the national gender response and UN partners. The following is a summary of the qualitative data with emphasis on questions 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 17, 18, 19 and 20.

1. Over the past five years, which of the following do you think have been the top five priorities for Eswatini in accelerating progress for women and girls through laws, policies and/or programmes?

In the past five years, Eswatini has prioritized several key areas to accelerate progress for women and girls through laws, policies, and programs. The most significant focus has been on eliminating violence against women and girls, with a substantial 89.5% of respondents recognizing it as a top priority. Additionally, access to healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, emerged as another critical area, identified by 63.3% of respondents. Political participation and representation were also emphasized, with 57.9% noting its importance, alongside equality and non-discrimination under the law and access to justice, and quality education, training, and life-long learning for women and girls, both garnering 52.6% of the responses. Other areas, such as poverty eradication, agricultural productivity, and food security, along with digital and financial inclusion for women, were less emphasized, with only 31.6% of respondents highlighting these as priorities. Interestingly, issues related to the right to work and rights at work, such as the gender pay gap and career progression, were not recognized as a priority by any respondents. This suggests that while Eswatini has made significant strides in specific areas concerning women's

rights and well-being, there are still gaps in addressing broader economic and social challenges that women face.

2. Over the past five years, where do you think that the country has taken specific measures to prevent discrimination and promote the rights of marginalized groups of women and girls?

In the past five years, Eswatini has focused on specific measures to prevent discrimination and promote the rights of marginalized groups of women and girls, with a particular emphasis on those living with HIV/AIDS. This group was highlighted by 73.7% of respondents as a key focus area, reflecting the country's ongoing efforts to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic and its impact on women and girls. Additionally, older women and those living in remote and rural areas were also prioritized, with 47.4% and 47.4% of respondents, respectively, identifying these groups as significant beneficiaries of targeted measures. It is evident from the respondent's responses that less emphasis was placed on other marginalized groups, such as women and girls with disabilities, who garnered 36.8% of the responses, and religious minority women and girls, who received 10.5%. Notably, migrant women and girls, as well as refugees and internationally displaced women and girls, were not identified as priority groups, indicating that Eswatini's efforts have been more concentrated on addressing challenges faced by women and girls within the country, particularly those impacted by health issues and rural living conditions.

4. Over the next five years, which of the following do you consider to be the top five priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in Eswatini through laws, policies and programmes?

Over the next five years, Eswatini's priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls through laws, policies, and programs are focused on addressing critical issues of violence and discrimination. Eliminating violence against women and girls stands as the top priority, with 84.2% of respondents identifying it as essential. Alongside this, equality and non-discrimination under the law, as well as access to justice, and quality education, training, and life-long learning for women and girls, were equally emphasized by 68.4% of respondents each. Access to affordable quality healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, was also highlighted by 57.9% as a key area of focus, reflecting a strong emphasis on health and legal equity. Other

priorities include the need for political participation and representation, noted by 52.6% of respondents, signaling a desire for greater inclusion of women in leadership roles. In contrast, issues such as the right to work and rights at work, women's entrepreneurship, and gender-responsive social protection were less emphasized, each receiving less than 26.3% of the responses. This suggests that while economic empowerment and protection are important, the most urgent needs lie in tackling violence, discrimination, and ensuring access to education and healthcare for women and girls in Eswatini.

5. Over the past five years, what actions have you/your institution taken to advance gender equality in the world of work?

From the 17 respondents who participated in the survey, the data shows that over the past five years, institutions in Eswatini have taken significant actions to advance gender equality in the world of work, with a particular focus on preventing sexual harassment and promoting women's participation in decision-making. The most prominent action, supported by 78.9% of respondents, has been the implementation of measures to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace, reflecting a strong commitment to creating safer work environments for women. Additionally, 63.2% of respondents indicated that mechanisms have been devised to ensure women's equal participation in decision-making bodies, highlighting efforts to promote gender parity in leadership roles. Other notable actions include advocating for strengthened laws and workplace policies that prohibit discrimination in recruitment, retention, and promotion, supported by 57.9% of respondents. Efforts to improve financial inclusion and access to credit for self-employed women were also significant, with 47.4% of respondents noting this as a key area of focus. Meanwhile, gender-responsive job creation and policies to support the transition from informal to formal work were addressed by 36.8% of respondents, indicating ongoing efforts to enhance women's economic empowerment in various sectors.

7. In the past five years, what actions have you/your institution taken to reduce the digital gender divide?

On the question of action take to reduce the gender divide, in the past five years, institutions in Eswatini have taken several actions to address the gender digital divide, focusing particularly on enhancing access and digital literacy for women and girls. Notably, 47.4% of respondents reported

efforts to remove discriminatory barriers that women and girls face in accessing, using, and designing digital tools. This includes addressing issues like the costs of devices and data, lack of skills, safety concerns, and restrictive social norms. Additionally, the same percentage of respondents highlighted the introduction or strengthening of programs aimed at increasing the digital literacy and skills of women and girls, underscoring a commitment to equipping them with the necessary competencies to thrive in the digital age. Other actions include efforts to promote gender-responsive STEM education, supported by 26.3% of respondents, and initiatives to provide universal meaningful connectivity, particularly in underserved areas, which was noted by 26.3%. Despite these efforts, fewer actions have been taken to mainstream gender perspectives in national digital policies or to create gender-responsive digital learning environments, both of which were highlighted by only 21.1% and 17.6% of respondents, respectively. This suggests that while progress has been made in certain areas, there is still room for further development in ensuring a fully inclusive digital landscape for women and girls in Eswatini.

8. In the last five years, what actions have you/your institution taken to reduce/eradicate poverty among women and girls?

In the last five years, institutions in Eswatini have taken various actions to reduce or eradicate poverty among women and girls, with a particular emphasis on supporting women's entrepreneurship. A significant 73.7% of respondents indicated that they have promoted women's access to markets and business development activities, highlighting efforts to empower women economically through entrepreneurship. Additionally, 47.4% of respondents noted actions aimed at promoting poor women's access to decent work through active labor market policies, such as job training and employment subsidies, reflecting a focus on improving employment opportunities for women. Other efforts include the introduction or strengthening of social protection programs tailored for women and girls, reported by 21.1% of respondents. These programs include cash transfers for women with children, public works or employment guarantee schemes, and pensions for older women. Additionally, 21.1% of respondents indicated that they have introduced or strengthened low-cost legal services for women living in poverty, aiming to provide legal support and protection. However, actions to broaden access to land, housing, finance, and technology were less common, with only 15.8% of respondents highlighting these measures, suggesting potential areas for further development in combating poverty among women and girls in Eswatini.

9. In the past five years, what actions have you/your institution taken to improve health outcomes for women and girls?

Over the past five years, institutions in Eswatini have implemented several actions to improve health outcomes for women and girls, with a strong emphasis on expanding specific health services and promoting access. The expansion of sexual and reproductive health services, maternal health, and HIV services was the most prominent action, reported by 78.9% of respondents. Additionally, 63.2% of respondents indicated efforts to promote women's access to health services through the expansion of universal health coverage or public health services, as well as measures to support women's mental health, including access to specialized services and counseling. These actions reflect a broad commitment to addressing both physical and mental health needs among women and girls. Significant actions also identified by respondents include promoting male involvement in sexual and reproductive health, including contraceptive uptake and responsible sexual behavior, also noted by 57.9% of respondents. Gender-specific public awareness and health promotion campaigns were undertaken by 52.6% of respondents, while 42.1% indicated efforts to expand access to health services for marginalized groups of women and girls. However, fewer actions have been taken to develop gender-sensitive approaches to the prevention and treatment of chronic and non-communicable diseases, with only 15.8% of respondents reporting such measures. This suggests that while significant strides have been made in expanding health services and education, there may be gaps in addressing chronic health conditions from a gender perspective.

10. In the past five years, what actions have you/your organization taken to improve education outcomes and skills for women and girls?

In the past five years, significant actions have been taken to improve education outcomes and skills for women and girls in Eswatini, with a focus on enhancing access and creating supportive learning environments. Promoting safe, harassment-free, and inclusive educational environments for women and girls was a major priority for 52.5% of respondents. Additionally, 47.4% of respondents have strengthened measures to prevent adolescent pregnancies and ensure that adolescent girls can continue their education if they become pregnant or become mothers. Another key area of focus was increasing girls' access to, retention in, and completion of primary and secondary education, which was reported by 42.1% of respondents. Institutions have also made

efforts to address barriers to school-to-work transitions for women and girls, as noted by 21.1% of respondents, and to promote safe water and sanitation services along with menstrual hygiene management in educational settings, also supported by 21.1%. Despite these initiatives, fewer actions were taken to strengthen educational curricula for gender responsiveness (5.3%) or to incorporate STEM education and digital tools to close the gender digital divide (10.5%). This indicates that while there has been progress in creating supportive and inclusive educational environments, there are still areas where additional focus is needed, particularly in integrating gender responsiveness into curricula and expanding opportunities in STEM fields.

12. In the past five years, what actions do you feel Eswatini has prioritized to address gender-based violence?

In the past five years, Eswatini has made notable strides in addressing gender-based violence, with a strong focus on enhancing legal frameworks and support services. A significant 78.9% of respondents noted that the country has introduced, updated, or expanded national action plans aimed at ending violence against women and girls. Additionally, 63.2% of respondents reported that laws against violence towards women have been introduced or strengthened, including their enforcement and implementation, demonstrating a commitment to improving legal protections. Efforts have also been directed toward improving services for survivors of violence, with 57.9% of respondents highlighting the introduction or strengthening of shelters, helplines, dedicated health services, legal assistance, and socioeconomic rehabilitation. Strategies and interventions to prevent violence, such as community mobilization and educational programs, were reported by 52.6% of respondents. Furthermore, measures to increase women's access to justice, including the establishment of specialist courts and training for the judiciary and police, were noted by 47.4%. However, monitoring and evaluation of impact, including evidence generation and data collection, were less emphasized, with only 36.8% reporting such activities. This suggests that while significant progress has been made in legal and support frameworks, there is room for further development in assessing and understanding the impact of these measures.

17. In the past five years, what actions and measures has Eswatini taken to promote women's participation in public life and decision-making?

In the past five years, Eswatini has undertaken several measures to promote women's participation in public life and decision-making. A notable effort has been the introduction of temporary special measures such as quotas, reserved seats, and targets to enhance women's representation in politics, with 52.6% of respondents highlighting this action. Additionally, 36.8% of respondents reported efforts to encourage the equal political participation of all women, including young women and underrepresented groups, through capacity building, skills development, and mentorship programs. However, it was noted that there has been less focus on other aspects of promoting gender parity in public life. Only 36.8% of respondents indicated that targets and benchmarks for gender balance in legislatures have been introduced or increased, and the same percentage noted efforts in providing capacity building for women in leadership roles. Measures to prevent and address violence against women in politics and public life, as well as whole-of-government gender parity laws, have seen minimal implementation, with only 5.3% of respondents reporting such actions. Despite these gaps, data collection and analysis on women's political participation were actively pursued by 47.4% of respondents, reflecting a commitment to understanding and enhancing women's roles in decision-making.

18. In the past five years, what actions do you think Eswatini has taken to build and sustain peace, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and implement the women, peace and security agenda?

In the past five years, Eswatini has undertaken a variety of actions to promote peace and implement the women, peace, and security agenda, though there are significant areas needing further attention. Approximately 31.6% of respondents noted that Eswatini has adopted or implemented a National Action Plan on women, peace, and security, and has used communication strategies, including social media, to raise awareness about the agenda. However, only 26.3% reported that commitments related to women, peace, and security have been integrated into key national and inter-ministerial policy and planning frameworks. There has been limited progress in other critical areas. Budgetary allocations for the implementation of the women, peace, and security agenda and steps to reduce military expenditures were not reported, with 0% indicating action in these areas. Reallocation of funds from military spending to social and economic development, including gender equality, was mentioned by only 5.3%, and 10.5% of respondents noted support for gender-sensitive conflict analysis and early warning mechanisms. Overall, 26.3% of respondents indicated

that none of these actions were taken, highlighting a need for more comprehensive and sustained efforts to advance the women, peace, and security agenda in Eswatini.

19. In the past five years, what actions have you/your institution taken to eliminate discrimination against and violations of the rights of the girl child, including adolescent girls?

In the past five years, significant efforts have been made to address the rights and discrimination against the girl child, including adolescent girls. A strong focus has been placed on promoting and strengthening girls' access to quality education, skills development, and training, with 84.2% of respondents highlighting this as a key action. Additionally, 63.2% of respondents reported taking measures to combat discriminatory social norms and practices and to increase awareness of the needs and potential of girl children. Efforts to promote girls' awareness of and participation in social, economic, and political life were also reported by 63.2% of respondents. Other notable actions include tackling health disadvantages due to malnutrition, early childbearing, and exposure to HIV/AIDS, as reported by 36.8% of respondents. Implementing policies and programs to eliminate violence against girls, including physical and sexual violence and harmful practices like child marriage, was noted by 36.8%. However, efforts to incorporate STEM education and address the gender digital divide were less prominent, with only 15.8% of respondents reporting such measures. Overall, while there has been significant progress in education and combating discriminatory practices, there is still room for more focused efforts in areas such as STEM education and digital access for girls.

20. In the past five years, what actions do you think Eswatini has taken to integrate gender perspectives and concerns into environmental policies, including biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and reduction of land degradation?

In the past five years, Eswatini has made notable strides in integrating gender perspectives into environmental policies, particularly in supporting women's roles and education. A significant focus has been on promoting women's participation and leadership in environmental and natural resource management and governance, with 52.9% of respondents highlighting this effort. Similarly, 64.7% of respondents reported that the education of women and girls in science, engineering, technology, and other relevant disciplines has been promoted. Additionally, 35.3% of respondents indicated that measures have been taken to increase women's access to and control

over land, water, energy, and other natural resources, and to monitor and evaluate the impact of environmental policies on women and girls. However, there are areas where progress has been limited. Only 17.6% of respondents noted efforts to raise awareness about gender-specific environmental hazards, and 0% reported significant enhancements in access to sustainable infrastructure or climate-resilient technology for women. Furthermore, only 5.9% of respondents mentioned steps to protect indigenous knowledge or ensure gender-sensitive just transitions. Overall, while there have been positive developments in women's participation and education, further action is needed to address gaps in infrastructure, job benefits, and protection of traditional knowledge.

Section 4: National Institutions and Processes

4.1. National Machinery for Gender Equality

The Department of Gender and Family Issues under the Deputy Prime Minister's Office (DPMO) still works as the gender coordinating body in the country.¹⁴¹ The DGFI grew 100% between 2023-2024 with a budget of 987,824 for 2022/23 and estimated 2,068,184 in 2024/25.¹⁴² The Government has initiated re-structuring processes and scaled up in human resources provision for the department. The department is mandated with the responsibility to mainstream gender and family issues into all areas of national development, including legislation, policies, programmes and projects. This entails further coordinating, directing and supervising all gender related policies, programmes and projects, ensuring ratification, implementation and state party reporting on international legal instruments on gender and monitoring and evaluating gender development activities in all sectors. Acknowledging the need to ensure full and equitable participation of women and men in development, the Government of Eswatini has revised the 2010 National Gender Policy to the most currently launched National Gender Policy of 2023-2028. This new policy gives full aspiration of the country to address gender related challenges and outlined lessons learnt in the implementation of the 2010 policy. The Country is in the process of simplifying and

¹⁴¹ Eswatini Gender Policy 2023-2028

¹⁴² Eswatini Government Budget-Estimates-2024-25

interpreting the National Gender Policy 2023 into the local language (SiSwati) and further developing policy briefs that will target decision makers. The policy outlines the national gender machinery and the roles and responsibilities of all the units. In order to ensure effectiveness, the National Gender Policy 2023¹⁴³ recommends that:

1. The DGFI be strengthened by upgrading it to a directorate and increasing the staff complement including recruiting an officer dedicated to family issues.
2. Establish a multi-sectoral Gender Equality Coordination Mechanism for proper coordination of the gender policy implementation.
3. Building the capacity of the Central Agencies and Gender Focal Teams in gender mainstreaming and budgeting and officially designating and defining their roles in the implementation of the policy.
4. Co-opting the private sector to be part of the gender machinery.
5. Ensure that Gender Responsive Budgeting is implemented in all the sectors.

4.2. The CANGO Gender Consortium

The Government of Eswatini has made effort to complement the DGFI through other players notably the Gender Consortium comprising of representatives from Non-Governmental Organizations working in diverse fields including, sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence, disability, child protection, organizations representing people of diverse sexualities, and human rights. The collaboration has assisted in the state reporting to international and regional bodies and monitoring progress in implementation towards achieving goals and targets. The Coordinating Assembly of No-Governmental Organizations (CANGO) works as the secretariat of the gender consortium.

4.3. Interministerial Gender Focal Teams

To further mainstream gender within the Government and facilitate all gender activities, inter-ministerial gender focal points were also appointed in all ministries. The gender focal team is in charge of providing the critical link between their ministries and the National Gender Machinery and other national gender structures. The public sector remains largely excluded and is not part of

¹⁴³ National Gender Policy 2023

the institutional arrangements put in place to advance gender equality. However, there has been great progress in private companies gaining interest in mainstream gender, addressing gender issues within the workplace and further establishing gender units and policies. The 16 Days of Activism Against Violence has become a national campaign for corporates.

4.4. Development Partners Coordination Mechanism of Gender Equality

The United Nations is committed to support Eswatini with acting on goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2023). The agencies gender related are informed by the countries and regional strategic frameworks which integrate into the Country Programme Documents with regular resources and designated gender focal person. The UN gender Theme Groups has an annual work plan which outlines gender activities from various agencies within the UN. There is also an action plan derived from the Score Cared on what UN Eswatini should do for gender mainstreaming. However, there is currently no coordination mechanism to facilitate joint implementation of the plan and limited joint programming and implementation of gender activities apart from gender-based violence activism. Other gender related frameworks include The UNFPA Gender Equality Strategy, UNAIDS Gender Equality Action Plan and WFP's Gender Action Plan 2022-2025.

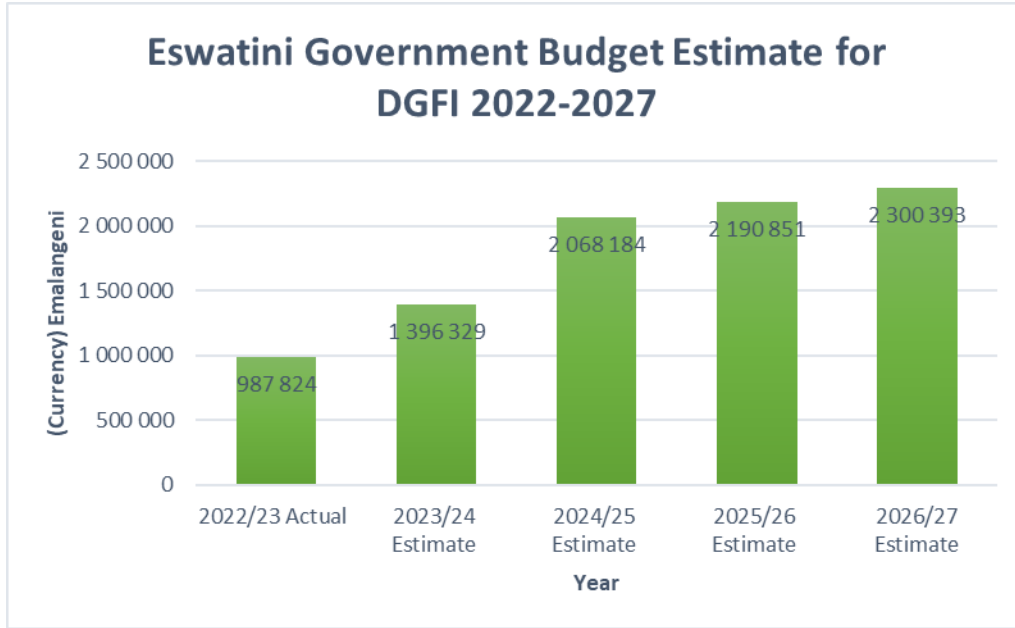
4.5. Gender Responsive Budgeting

Eswatini's gender responsive budgeting framework places gender equality at the centre of the Government's decision making. A the country has made commitments to gender equality through various policies and frameworks including the National Gender Policy 2023 and the National Development Strategy 2023 as reflected in the National Estimated Budget 2024/25.¹⁴⁴ All national strategies indicate that budgeting for gender in Eswatini is part of broader efforts to advance gender equality and women's empowerment, recognizing that addressing gender inequalities requires targeted interventions in budgetary policies and allocations. By integrating a gender perspective into budgetary processes, the country will ensure that public resources contribute to reducing gender inequalities and promoting inclusive development. Due to limited funding of gender programmes, there is a major threat to the successful implementation of the policies and

¹⁴⁴ Estimated Budget 2014/25, <https://www.gov.sz/images/FinanceDocuments/Budget-Estimates-2024-25-Final-Print-Version.pdf>

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frameworks. The inadequate budgetary allocation leads to heavy reliance on development partners for implementation, which ultimately affects the sustainability of national programmes. The following graph shows budget estimates for the Department of Gender and Family issues:



Source: Eswatini Government (Budget Estimate 2024/25)

Section 5: Data and Statistics

5.1. Gender Statistics

The Department of Gender and Family Issues continues to advocate for the collection and use of national data to inform programmes. The National Gender Policy 2023 comes with a strategy, action plan and monitoring and evaluation frameworks to enhance accountability and effectiveness. This will ensure the tracking of progress on gender and ensuring that data is reflected in state reports compiled by the NMRF and ultimately ensuring informed decision making in the planning and implementation of gender programmes.

The Monitoring and evaluation framework will further enhance: ¹⁴⁵

Tracking progress towards the 2030 gender equality targets set out in SDG Agenda 2030 and the revised SADC Protocol on Gender and Development including national targets.

- i. Enhance mid-term evaluation on the implementation of the NGP, 2023
- ii. Guide and inform reporting on NGP implementation at both central Government and lower subnational levels (Regions and communities)
- iii. Inform national gender indicators, in which all stakeholders will report on
- iv. Monitor the success of the implementation of the policy and documentation of best practices.
- v. Promote/ entrenching the culture of M&E at all levels of Government and civil society
- vi. Provide timely and reliable feedback on policy implementation to the budgetary preparation process.
- vii. Promote utilization of monitoring and evaluation data in policy and program implementation and future planning.
- viii. Utilized to advocate and lobby for the domestication of the provisions of ratified regional and international instruments on gender development and to ensure implementation of gender responsive policies and laws.
- ix. Enhancement of gender planning and analysis skills

¹⁴⁵ National Gender Policy 2023

The Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, Central Statistics Office is the custodian of data and statistics in the country. The CSO was established by the Statistics Act of 1976, and it effectively coordinates the National Statistical System, providing high quality data and information required for evidence-based policy, planning and decision making for national socio-economic development, administration, accountability and to promote the culture of using data. The National Population Unit and line Ministries including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture also undertake evidence and policy studies in their respective sectors. Other research institutions include the University of Eswatini (UNESWA) and Eswatini Economic Policy Analysis and Research Centre (ESEPARC) which aims to build sustainable national capacity to improve quality and timeless policies in the country and legislative framework.

Eswatini's implementation of obligations is coordinated by the National Mechanism for Reporting and Feedback (NRMF) under the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, which is responsible for reporting recommendations from UN human rights mechanisms like the UPR. The NRMF ensures that Eswatini fulfils its international human rights obligations by reviewing recommendations and coordinating with relevant government agencies to implement necessary reforms. This mechanism plays a crucial role in promoting accountability and transparency in the country's human rights efforts. The NRMF further engages with civil society organizations and other stakeholders to ensure a participatory approach in the implementation process. This collaboration helps to strengthen the protection and promotion of human rights in Eswatini.

To further strengthen research and evidence informed interventions, the country has conducted studies and surveillances which provide sex desegregated data and have been commissioned in collaboration with the Central Statistics Unit. These studies include:

- i. Eswatini HIV Stigma Index (2019)
- ii. World Bank _Eswatini Education Sector Analysis (2021)
- iii. Population Based HIV Impact Assessment –SHIMS III (2021)
- iv. Eswatini HIV-1 Recent Infection Surveillance (EHRIS) (2022)
- v. Violence Against Children and Youth Survey (VACS) (2022)
- vi. Eswatini Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2021-2022)

- vii. Integrated Biological-Behavioural Surveillance Survey (IBBSS) (2021)
- viii. National Surveillance Survey on Violence (2024)

5.2. Eswatini Gender Profile

Eswatini has conducted two processes for developing the countries Gender Profile through the support of the UN Women and the Africa Development Bank. The Gender Profiles provide a comprehensive analysis of gender issues in Eswatini, including areas such as education, health, and economic participation. This data helps inform policies and programs that promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the country. Furthermore, it works as a baseline form monitoring progress towards gender equality in Eswatini over time. Programmers and implementing partners can extract relevant data to use in programmes design. The country's most recent gender profile was produced in 2022 with the support from (UN Women)

5.3. Civic Registration

The Government of Eswatini launched a five-year Civic Registration and Vital Statistics Plan 2022-2026. The five-year plan provided a comprehensive and costed action that outlines priority activities. The plan aims to improve the accuracy and efficiency of civil registration systems in Eswatini, ultimately leading to better data collection and analysis for informed decision-making. It also includes measures to increase public awareness and participation in the registration process addressing barriers to registration such as lack of access in rural areas and cultural beliefs. The Ministry of Tinkhundla has decentralized registration processes to take place within Tinkhundla Centres through mobile caravans.

5.4. Other Sources of data

The World Bank Open Data: The World Bank Databank collects regular data on various socio-economic indicators with some specific data on gender and in Eswatini. This helps to compare Eswatini with other countries and to supplement some gaps in data collected by local agencies.

<https://data.worldbank.org/>

Gender Inequality Index: The Gender Inequality Index (GII) is a composite measure of gender inequality using three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and the labour market.

5.5. Data Disaggregation

Data disaggregation by sex (male and female) is common in Eswatini’s major surveys and studies. Depending on the survey, data is also disaggregated by Age, this allows for analysis of gender gaps across different age groups. Location helps to identify parities between rural and urban areas. There is currently limited gender data in the country therefore efforts are made to collect and analyse data from a gender perspective to understand diversities.

Section 6: Future Country Priorities on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls

5.1. Lessons Learnt

The Eswatini government has made significant progress in implementing the BPfA and meeting Agenda 2030's sustainable development targets. However, the country faces several challenges in achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls. These challenges include cultural and societal norms that perpetuate gender inequity, barriers to education and economic opportunities for some women, and a lack of reliable data for policy decisions, especially in the fight against gender-based violence. Understanding how traditional Swazi cultural practices align with modern gender equality initiatives will be crucial in advancing the gender equality agenda. This understanding could reveal dynamics and innovative strategies that the country can use to promote women's rights while respecting cultural heritage, which will be more readily accepted by cultural practitioners and conservatives. It is essential for the government to develop a mechanism to directly engage citizens in evaluating the effectiveness of policies and laws as well as in development and infrastructure projects which concern them. A systematic review at the country level in the Beijing Declaration Platform for Action progress on the 12 critical areas of concern will facilitate the collection of relevant and real-time data and track the country's progress yearly.

5.2. State Response to Challenges

The Government of Eswatini, along with its partners, has recognized these gaps and is taking steps to address them. Efforts include:

5.2.1. Strengthening Legal Frameworks

The country is working towards enhancing the enforcement of existing laws and developing comprehensive gender-sensitive policies to address various aspects of gender inequality. Moving forward, Eswatini is addressing gaps in implementation, enhancing coordination among relevant stakeholders, and continuing to raise awareness about women's rights and gender equality. For instance, the process of simplifying and interpreting Laws and policies is being implemented. The

Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act of 2018 interpretation and simplification process was completed, and the country is in the process of doing the same with the National Gender Policy of 2023. As the country is a signatory to various treaties and conventions that promote gender equality and women's empowerment, including BPfA and CEDWA, compliance with these international standards will require alignment of laws with these international instruments. The country will also consider meet its obligations at regional level such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development, which provides a framework for addressing gender issues at a regional level.

5.3.2. Addressing Social and Gender Norms

The country is committed to establish community-based interventions in form of dialogue and national campaigns to address social and gender norms that marginalizes women and girls. This has been seen to be a success in the 2023 pre-election civic education programmes that were rolled out in constituencies. Community leaders played a crucial role in championing this initiative and challenging harmful norm that are seen to be existence within communities. This strategy will be instrumental in encouraging more women to join fields like science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

5.3.3. Economic Programs

The Government will expand access to finance and training programs for women entrepreneurs, particularly in rural areas, to support their economic empowerment. Efforts are focusing on addressing cultural barriers and ensuring adequate resources are allocated to support women's empowerment and protection. The National Financial Inclusion Strategy of 2023 makes commitment to remove all barriers that deprive women from accessing financial resources, with intent to focus more on supporting women in the informal sector (SMMEs).

5.2.4. Education Initiatives

The Ministry of Education is introducing programmes that will ensure adolescent girls who fall pregnant will remain in schools and there is further protection according to the SODVA 2018 age of sexual consent. The country is continuing to promote STEM and increasing the number of TVET programs nation-wide and mostly targeting rural community girls where there are strong social norms that discourage girls from acquiring education. Through the Ministry of Labour and

Social Security, the Government will continue to equitably provide scholarships to students and ensure that STEM is promoted in women as they choose their career path.

5.2.5. Health Services Improvement

Eswatini is dedicated to increasing investment in healthcare infrastructure and training healthcare providers to improve access to reproductive health services, especially in rural areas. As indicated in the budget estimates 2024/25, the Government continues to increase the Ministry of Health budget, to ensure access to quality health services by promoting regular antenatal and postnatal care visits to reduce maternal mortality and increasing access to variety of contraceptive methods ensuring comprehensive family planning counselling and services is available for all women including those in rural communities. This includes further attention to NCDs with screening and testing services provided in all facilities.

5.2.6. Combating Gender-Based Violence

Future interventions are geared towards ensuring the elimination of gender-based violence (GBV). To achieve, the country has developed strategies for community engagement to change attitudes and mind-sets towards GBV. This includes enhancing support services for survivors, including shelters and legal aid, and promoting awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and encourage reporting of violence. The DPMO Department of Gender and Family Issues will continue to monitor progress in the implementation of the National Strategy to End Violence and ensure a multisectoral approach in the GBV response. The department will further ensure that surveillance data is collected and analysed to make data informed decisions and ultimately developing strategies that will eliminate gender-based violence and femicide completely.

5.2.7. Promoting Political Participation

The Government will continue to implement quotas and conduct community programmes and awareness campaigns to encourage women to participate in positions of decision making in the country. The state commitment has been portrayed in the 2023 elections and the appointment of Ministers and the first Female Deputy Prime Minister in the history of Eswatini.

5.2.7. Capacity Building

Providing resources and training to institutional mechanisms to improve their capacity to promote and monitor gender equality initiatives effectively. The Government will also engage the private sector and work collaboratively with CSOs to promote workplace equality and addressing harassment and other barriers for women to reach their full potential and exploring opportunities without being discriminated by gender or sex. Resources will be allocated for trainings to improve capacity to promote and monitor gender equality effectively. The DGFI has prioritised capacity building and systems strengthening as part of the GBV Costed Plan of Action 2024/25 -2026/27. The plan of action will further allow the country to develop Prevention of Sexual Exploitation Abuse and Harassment guidelines.

5.2.8 Poverty Reduction among Women and Girls

Following national strategies to improve the quality of life in Eswatini, the country's future interventions across different sectors will offer women the opportunity to generate income, secure decent jobs and have access to social protection programmes for poverty reduction. Through the Ministry of Agriculture, education on crop production will be provided to address the issue of food security. This initiative will empower women economically but also contribute to the wellbeing of the family.

5.3. Conclusion

This report demonstrates Eswatini's significant advancements in achieving gender equality. It boldly acknowledges the implementation of robust legislative, policy, and structural reforms over the past five years (2019- 2024), providing invaluable insights into the current state of gender equality and women's empowerment. The report recognizes that insufficient funding has hindered the implementation of crucial gender equality programmes. The Government is committed to advancing the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and the 2030 Agenda by significantly increasing budget estimates for the Department of Gender and Family Issues in 2024/25. Moreover, the Government is determined to explore innovative funding mechanisms earmarking funding for gender-related activities in collaborating with the United Nations Gender Theme Group and other development agencies. The country will continue to mobilize all sectors especially civil society to reach the public to advance gender equality and eliminate violence against women. To fortify the

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country's commitment, law reform and strategies will be implemented to guarantee women's access to quality education, healthcare, economic empowerment, access to justice, participating in decision-making positions, digital and financial inclusion, and protection of their rights regardless of their gender. The Eswatini government is committed to increase women enrolment and completion in ICT, STEM, and TVET programs. National strategies to enhance standard of living and reduce poverty will be implemented across different communities, with a focus on providing income, decent jobs, and continued social protection programs. The country is also dedicated to addressing the harmful gender roles, norms and stereotypes, including women's employment and unpaid care burden which lie at the root of persistent gender inequalities.

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