SOUTHERN AFRICA GENDER 2026

BAROMETER



Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance

Women, Peace and Security

Acknowledgements

This chapter was authored by Michelle Mutogo, Gender Links Alliance and Partnership Co-ordinator, under the editorial direction of Colleen Lowe Morna, Special Advisor at Gender Links. We acknowledge Debi Lee Designs for the layout and proof reading.

The analysis draws on the 2026 Southern Africa Gender and Development Index (SGDI), supported by Monica Bandeira and the Gender Links SGDI team. We also acknowledge the institutional and statistical sources underpinning the Women, Peace and Security indicators, including SecurityWomen, United Nations Peacekeeping, the Women in Diplomacy Index and the Southern Africa Gender and Media Progress Study.

Special appreciation goes to Anna Mayimona Ngemba (UCOFEM DRC) and Ialfine Papisy and FPPE Madagascar, representing the organisations co-leading the Women, Peace and Security thematic cluster of the Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance, for their leadership and contributions to the reference group that helped shape this chapter.

We acknowledge the country case study contributions of Lauriane Kizamina and Anna Mayimona Ngemba (UCOFEM DRC), Venessa Ikarakwu (Seychelles), Vera Assenga (Tanzania Gender Networking Programme) and Abigail Matsvayi (Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association). Their contributions provide important perspectives on women's experiences of conflict, peacebuilding, protection, institutional accountability and the implementation of Resolution 1325 across Southern Africa.

Sincere appreciation to the Gender Links team and Alliance partners who contributed photographs to the chapter. The photographs were drawn primarily from the Gender Links institutional photo library, alongside images supplied by case study contributors. Photographers acknowledged in the chapter include Colleen Lowe Morna, Thandokuhle Dlamini, Cheryl Hendricks, Michelle Mutogo and Marc Fimbo.

Finally, we thank the women, peacebuilders, community leaders, civil society organisations and institutions whose experiences and work inform this chapter. Their contributions underscore the importance of women's meaningful participation, protection, leadership and access to justice in building sustainable peace and security across Southern Africa.

Alliance partners
Angola
Plataform da Mulheres Acção
Botswana
Botswana Network on Ethics, Law and HIV/AIDS
DRC
Union Congolaise des Femmes des Medias
Eswatini
Eswatini Young Women's Alliance
Lesotho
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Mauritius
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Forum Mulher
Namibia
Namibia Non-Governmental Organisation Forum
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Women and Law in Southern Africa – Zambia
Zimbabwe
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GENDER LINKS
FOR EQUALITY AND JUSTICE

Women, Peace and Security

11



Key points

- The regional Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Gender Equality Score in the Southern Africa Gender and Development Index (SGDI) is 34 out of 100. Namibia records the highest country score at 60, followed by South Africa at 59 and Madagascar at 50. Comoros is excluded from the assessment due to missing data (Gender Links, 2026).
- Women's representation in diplomatic services is the strongest of the five WPS indicators, with a regional Gender Equality Score of 64. Women's participation in peace support initiatives is the weakest at 15 (Gender Links, 2026).
- Nine SADC countries have National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS following recent adoption by Zimbabwe and Tanzania. Seven countries still lacked NAPs at the point captured by the 2026 SGDI, while implementation, financing and public reporting remain uneven (Gender Links, 2026).
- SADC launched the Network of Women Mediators in Southern Africa in January 2025. In 2026, SADC also commissioned a baseline study on women's participation in Female Engagement Teams and women's mediation networks in peace support operations, signalling growing attention to measurement and accountability (SADC, 2025; SADC, 2026).
- Contemporary WPS concerns in Southern Africa extend beyond conventional armed conflict. They include electoral violence, xenophobia and migration related insecurity, political transitions, misinformation, community conflict, climate and disaster risks, and women's access to justice and essential services.
- The evidence points to a persistent gap between women's presence and women's influence. The Post 2030 review of Article 28 of the SADC Protocol offers an opportunity to strengthen participation, prevention, protection, relief and recovery, accountability, financing and monitoring.

[1] SADC (2025) "SADC launches the Network of Women Mediators in Southern Africa to strengthen women's participation in mediation and conflict prevention", 31 January. Available at: https://www.sadc.int/latest-news/sadc-launches-network-women-mediators-southern-africa-strengthen-womens-participation (Accessed: 9 October 2026); SADC (2026) "Consultancy for baseline study on participation of Female Engagement Teams and mediation networks of women in SADC peace support operations", 19 August. Available at: https://sadc.int/procurement-opportunities/consultancy-baseline-study-participation-female-engagement-teams-and (Accessed: 9 October 2026).

Introduction



On 9 October 2026, South African jurist Navanethem "Navi" Pillay was announced as the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize laureate for her contribution to peace and international law. Her recognition celebrates a Southern African woman whose work helped strengthen international justice and accountability for atrocities committed during conflict.[2]

Born in Durban in 1941, Pillay challenged apartheid as a lawyer before serving on South Africa's High Court, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), the International Criminal Court and as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (2008-2014). Her career shows how women can shape the institutions that determine justice and peace.[3]

As one of three judges in the 1998 Prosecutor v. Jean-Paul Akayesu judgment, Pillay helped establish that rape and other forms of sexual violence may constitute genocide when committed with the required intent. The ruling also recognised rape as a crime against humanity. This was a turning point in confronting impunity for conflict related sexual violence.[4]

Her work speaks directly to Resolution 1325, which links women's participation in peace processes to prevention, protection and recovery. The award demonstrates why numerical representation is insufficient: women must also exercise judicial, diplomatic and institutional authority to shape accountability and protect survivors.[5]

Article 28 of the revised SADC Protocol calls for women's equal participation in conflict resolution, peacebuilding and peacekeeping, and accountability for human rights abuses. Pillay's contribution is especially relevant as women in eastern DRC and northern Mozambique continue to face violence and displacement. Her Nobel Prize invites Southern Africa to pair celebration with measurable action: women in decision making, survivor centred justice, funded protection and stronger regional accountability after 2030.[6]

More than 25 years after United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda still demands that women shape peace rather than merely survive conflict. The Resolution established commitments to women's participation, protection and gender responsive prevention and recovery (United Nations Security Council, 2000).[7]

Southern Africa faces conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and northern Mozambique, alongside electoral tensions, displacement, migration related hostility, misinformation and climate insecurity. These challenges affect women in different ways and require a WPS agenda beyond battlefields.

[2] Norwegian Nobel Committee (2026) 'Nobel Peace Prize for 2026', 9 October. Available at: https://www.nobelpeaceprize.org/press/press-releases/nobel-peace-prize-for-2026 (Accessed: 13 October 2026).
[3] United Nations (2026) '2026: Navanethem Pillay', Nobel Peace Prize. Available at: https://www.un.org/en/about-us/nobel-peace-prize/navi-pillay-2026 (Accessed: 13 October 2026).
[4] International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (1998) 'Historic judgement finds Akayesu guilty of genocide', 2 September. Available at: https://unictr.irmct.org/en/news/historic-judgement-finds-akayesu-guilty-genocide (Accessed: 13 October 2026).
[5] United Nations Security Council (2000) Resolution 1325 (2000), S/RES/1325. New York: United Nations. Available at: https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1325(2000) (Accessed: 13 October 2026).
[6] Southern African Development Community (2016) Consolidated Text of the Protocol on Gender and Development, Article 28. Gaborone: SADC Secretariat. Available at: https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2023-02/EN-REVISED_SADC_PROTOCOL_ON_GENDER_AND_DEVELOPMENT_2016-final.pdf (Accessed: 13 October 2026).
[7] United Nations Security Council (2000) Resolution 1325 (2000), S/RES/1325. New York: United Nations. Available at: https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1325(2000) (Accessed: 6 October 2026).

The 2026 Southern Africa Gender and Development Index (SGDI) gives the region a WPS Gender Equality Score (GES) of 34 out of 100 (Gender Links, 2026). Diplomacy substantially outperforms participation in peace support, raising questions about women's access to operational decision making.[8]

Building on the 2015 Barometer, this chapter examines Resolution 1325, Article 28 of the SADC Protocol, representation in security institutions, peace support, mediation and emerging threats, before proposing measurable changes for the Post 2030 agenda.



Participant at the Gender Links Voice and Choice Summit holding a poster of what they are pushing forward for in March 2026, Johannesburg.
Photo: Thandokuhle Dlamini

Tracking progress: from the 2015 Barometer to 2026

The 2015 Barometer documented uneven security sector data and only one recorded SADC National Action Plan (NAP), in DRC. By the 2026 SGDI assessment nine countries had adopted NAPs, but financing, implementation and public reporting remain uneven (Gender Links, 2015; Gender Links, 2026).[9]

Table 11.1: Selected WPS trends and accountability questions, 2015 and 2026

Area	2015 Barometer	2026 assessment/next accountability test
National Action Plans	DRC was the only SADC country recorded with a NAP	Nine of 16 countries have NAPs in the SGDI; examine financing, implementation and public reporting
Defence	Data reported for 12 of 15 countries; South Africa 30%, Namibia 23%	Women remain a minority in every observed defence force; report by rank and command
Police	Data reported for 13 of 15 countries; Seychelles 39%, Namibia 31%	Seychelles 39% and Namibia 38%; verify underlying year and women in command
Correctional services	Sex-disaggregated workforce data reported for six countries	No comparable correctional-services indicator in the 2026 SGDI; strengthen reporting
Peacekeeping and peace support	UN peacekeeping deployment figures and 2013-2014 comparison	2026 SGDI shows a pronounced participation gap; distinguish contributions, deployment and mediation
Women's security	Attention to conflict, GBV and broader human security	Account for displacement, elections, climate shocks, migration and technology-related threats

Source: Gender Links (2015), SADC Gender Protocol 2015 Barometer, Chapter 8; Gender Links (2026), SGDI Women, Peace and Security indicator dataset. The 2015 and 2026 measures are not identical

[8] Gender Links (2026) Southern Africa Gender and Development Index 2026. Johannesburg: Gender Links. Interactive dataset supplied to the Barometer team. Public SGDI overview: https://www.genderlinks.org.za/knowledge-hub/news/southern-africa-holding-a-fragile-line-on-gender-equality (Accessed: 9 October 2026). The public overview is not a substitute for the complete country and indicator dataset.

[9] Gender Links (2015) SADC Gender Protocol 2015 Barometer, Chapter 8: "Peace building and conflict resolution". Johannesburg: Gender Links. Available at: https://www.genderlinks.org.za/alliance/sadc-gender-protocol-barometer/2015-sadc-gender-protocol-barometer (Accessed: 13 October 2026).

International and regional legal and policy framework

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) requires greater participation by women in peace negotiations, peacekeeping, prevention and reconstruction, alongside protection from violence. Subsequent WPS resolutions elaborate conflict related sexual violence, accountability and implementation obligations (United Nations Security Council, 2000).[10]

CEDAW General Recommendation No. 30 clarifies states' obligations in conflict prevention, conflict and recovery, including displacement and political unrest. The Maputo Protocol recognises women's right to peace (Article 10) and protection during armed conflict (Article 11) (CEDAW Committee, 2013; African Union, 2003).[11] [12]

Revised **Article 28 of the SADC Protocol (2016)** requires equal participation in conflict resolution, peacebuilding and peacekeeping, protection against abuses and accountability for perpetrators. It sets no explicit 2030 deadline. **Articles 33 and 35** provide for resourcing, action plans, baseline data and reporting (SADC, 2016).[13]

Subsequent Security Council resolutions developed the agenda: Resolution 1820 (2008) addresses sexual violence; 1888 and 1889 (2009) strengthen expertise and implementation; 1960 (2010) provides monitoring arrangements; 2106 and 2122 (2013) advance justice and participation; 2242 (2015) responds to evolving threats; and 2467 and 2493 (2019) reinforce survivor centred action and implementation.[14]

General Recommendation No. 30 applies women's human rights across armed conflict, political unrest, displacement and post conflict recovery. Its 2026 addendum addresses emerging risks, including technology and climate related insecurity. Women's protection and participation therefore remain relevant even without a formally declared war.[15]

SADC Article 28 must be read with Articles 33 and 35, which already address resources, budgets, national plans, monitoring and reporting. The question is whether these mechanisms deliver measurable participation, protection and accountability.



Community members participate in a crisis response and relief activity in Soul City, South Africa. *Photo: Gender Links*

[10] United Nations Security Council (2000) Resolution 1325, S/RES/1325(2000). Available at: https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1325(2000) (Accessed: 13 October 2026).
[11] Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2013) General Recommendation No. 30, CEDAW/C/GC/30. Available at: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/764506 (Accessed: 13 October 2026).
[12] African Union (2003) Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, Articles 10 and 11. Available at: https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights-rights-women-africa (Accessed: 13 October 2026).
[13] SADC (2016) Revised SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, Articles 28, 33 and 35. Available at: https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2023-02/EN-REVISED_SADC_PROTOCOL_ON_GENDER_AND_DEVELOPMENT_2016-final.pdf (Accessed: 13 October 2026).
[14] United Nations Security Council (2008-2019) WPS Resolutions 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2242, 2467 and 2493. UNSC Resolution documents available from: https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/resolutions (Accessed: 13 October 2026).
[15] Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2026) Addendum to General Recommendation No. 30, CEDAW/C/GC/30/Add.1. Available at: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4107182 (Accessed: 13 October 2026).

Table 11.2: Complementarity between Resolution 1325 and the SADC Protocol

Instrument	Main provision	Accountability question for Southern Africa
UNSCR 1325 and subsequent WPS resolutions	Participation; prevention; protection; relief and recovery; accountability for sexual violence	Are women shaping negotiations, command decisions, prevention and recovery?
CEDAW and General Recommendation No. 30	Non-discrimination and women's rights before, during and after conflicts	Are protection and justice available in political unrest, displacement and conflict?
Maputo Protocol, Articles 10-11	Right to peace; participation in conflict resolution; protection in armed conflict	Do national laws and practices protect women's rights and participation?
Revised SADC Protocol, Article 28 Revised SADC	Equal participation in conflict resolution, peacebuilding and peacekeeping; prevent abuses and ensure justice	How are states measuring women's influence and protection?
Protocol, Articles 33 and 35	Resources, gender responsive budgeting, action plans, baselines and reporting	Are WPS commitments costed and independently monitored?
SADC Regional WPS Strategy 2018-2030	Mainstreams WPS in regional peace and security structures	Are plans connected to mediation, operations and community peacebuilding?

Sources: United Nations Security Council (2000); CEDAW Committee (2013); African Union (2003); SADC (2016, 2022)

As in 2015, representation data must be tested against security legislation and institutions: recruitment, leadership, equal opportunity, survivor protection and complaints mechanisms. Unverified older legal findings should not be repeated as current law.

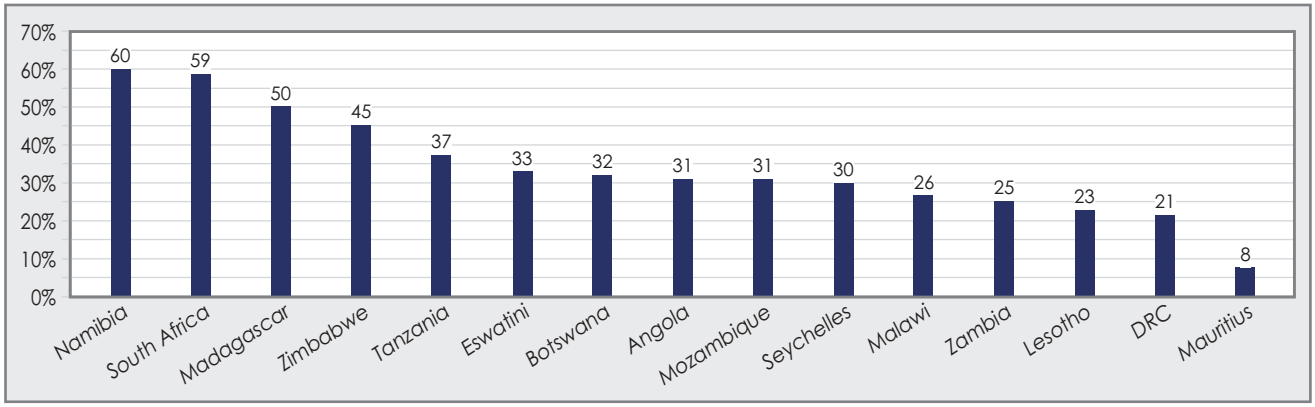
The 2015 Barometer found many defence, police and prison laws lacked explicit gender provisions. Examples of subsequent reform include Namibia's defence equality policy, South Africa's senior military appointments, Malawi's 2026 Police Gender Policy and Zimbabwe's WPS National Action Plan (Gender Links, 2015; relevant national sources).For regional accountability, states should publish current security legislation and comparable workforce figures by gender, rank, command and deployment.

The 2026 Women, Peace and Security assessment

The SGDI converts the five WPS indicators into Gender Equality Scores (GES) out of 100, where 100 represents parity or the intended equality outcome (Gender Links, 2026).The five indicators cover women's participation in peace support, diplomatic services, defence, police and sources in conflict and peace news. Original data include UN Peacekeeping, the Women in Diplomacy Index 2025, SecurityWomen (2024) and the 2026 Southern Africa Gender and Media Progress Study (Gender Links, 2026).[16] NAP adoption is policy evidence, not one of the five quantitative SGDI indicators. Plans alone cannot demonstrate equal participation.

[16] Gender Links (2026) Southern Africa Gender and Development Index 2026, Women, Peace and Security. Original indicator sources: UN Peacekeeping, https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors; Women in Diplomacy Index 2025, https://www.agda.ac.ae/research/publications-multimedia-events/publication-details/2025-women-in-diplomacy-index; SecurityWomen statistics (2024), https://www.securitywomen.org/resources/statistics; Southern Africa Gender and Media Progress Study 2026 (Accessed: 13 October 2026 where publicly accessible).

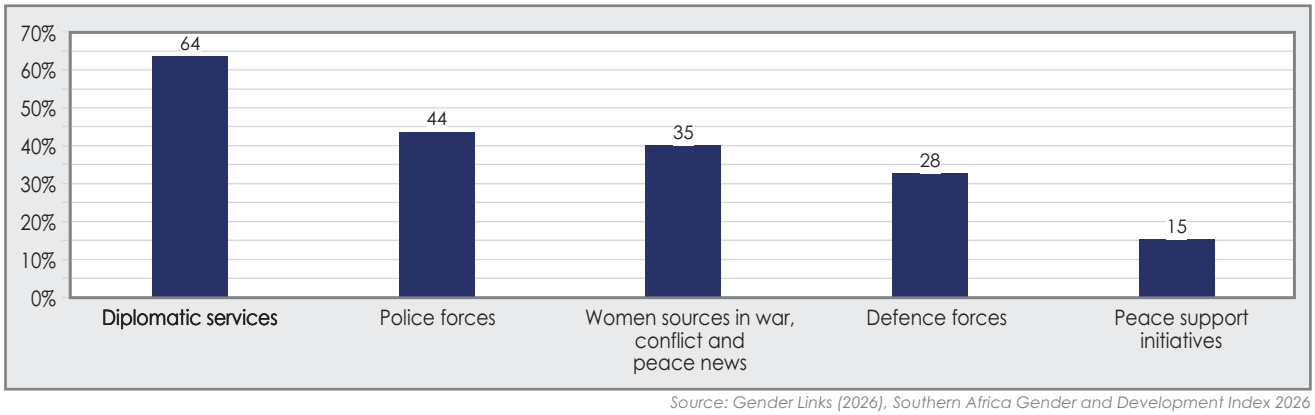
Figure 11.1: Women, Peace and Security Gender Equality Score by country, 2026



Source: Gender Links (2026), Southern Africa Gender and Development Index 2026

Figure 11.1 shows that with a GES of 60%, Namibia leads, followed by South Africa (59%), Madagascar (50%) and Zimbabwe (45%). Malawi, Zambia, Lesotho, DRC and Mauritius all score below 30%. These scores describe the measured indicators, not all women's peace-building activity, particularly where reporting is incomplete (Gender Links, 2026).

Figure 11.2: Regional Women, Peace and Security Gender Equality Scores by indicator, 2026



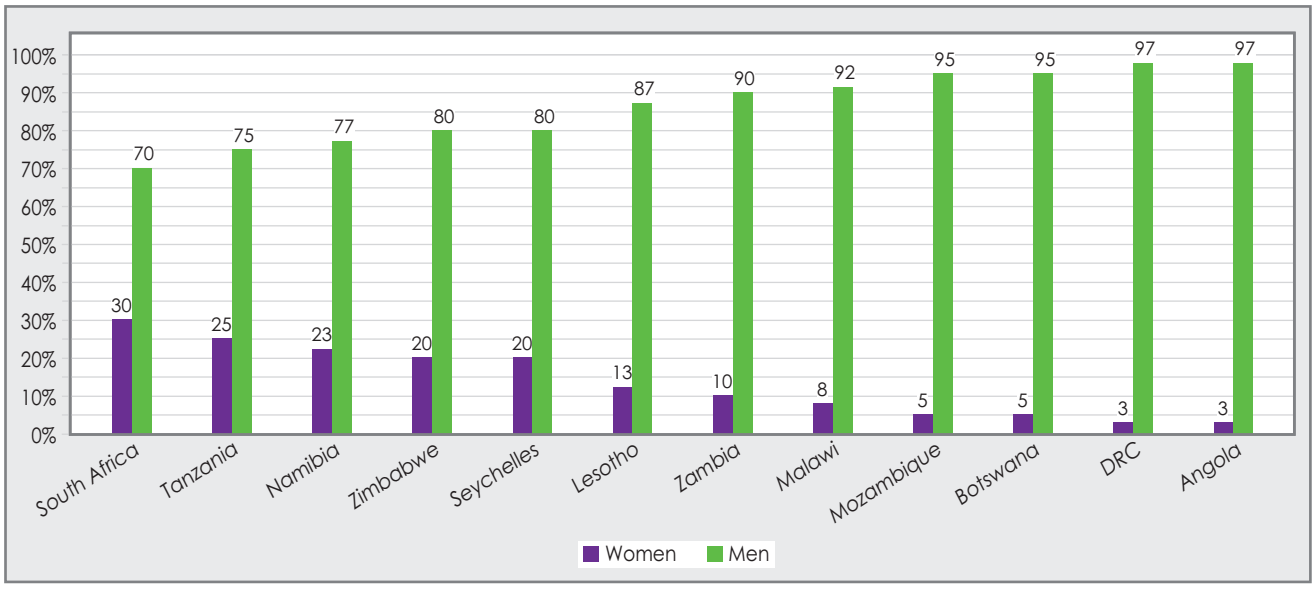
Source: Gender Links (2026), Southern Africa Gender and Development Index 2026

Figure 11.2 ranks scores according to the five indicators as measured across the region. Diplomacy scores highest (64%) followed by police (44%), media sources (35%), defence (28%) and peace support (15%). Women's representation in institutions remains much stronger than their participation in operational peace support (Gender Links, 2026). Regional scores of 15% in peace support and 28% in defence show that NAP adoption does not guarantee participation. Incomplete country data further weaken independent monitoring (Gender Links, 2026).



Florah Ndabah of TGNP at the Voice and Choice Summit in March 2026, Johannesburg, South Africa. *Photo: Thandokuhle Dlamini*

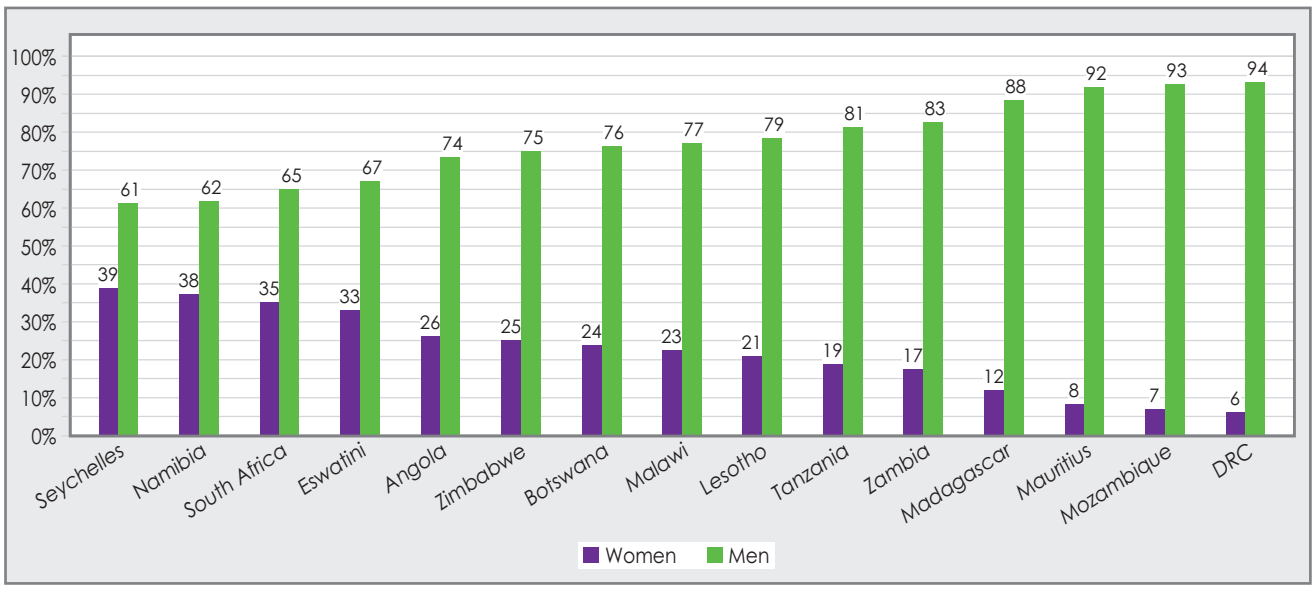
Figure 11.3: Women and men in defence forces



Source: Gender Links (2026), SGDI 2026; source data: SecurityWomen (2024), www.securitywomen.org/resources/statistics

The 2015 Barometer reported 30% women in South Africa's defence force, 23% in Namibia, 20% in Zimbabwe and Seychelles, and 3% in DRC. These figures remain much the same in the latest data available (2024). Gender equality in defence requires promotion into command, fair training and deployment selection, suitable facilities and safety. South Africa's appointment of Major General Thalita Mxakato in 2022 and Namibia's defence equality policy demonstrate relevant institutional efforts (South African Presidency, 2022; Ministry of Defence, Namibia, n.d.).

Figure 11.4: Women and men in police services



Source: Gender Links (2026), SGDI 2026; source data: SecurityWomen (2024), www.securitywomen.org/resources/statistics



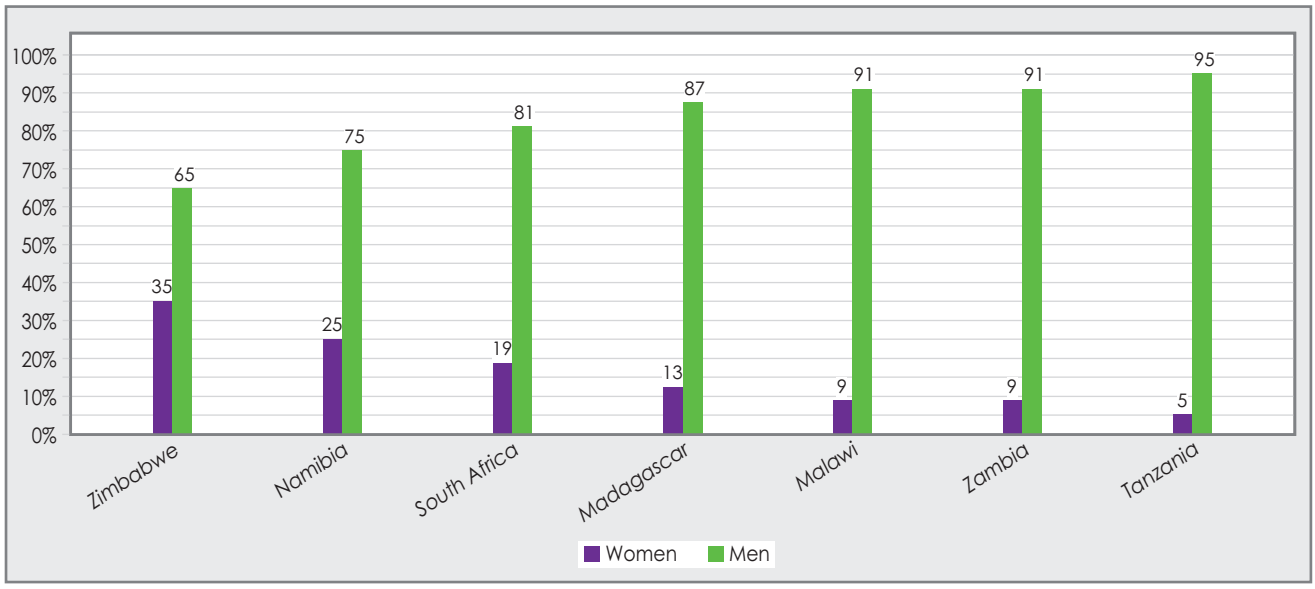
Members of the South African Police Service and the public join a march against gender based violence during the 16 Days of Activism campaign, Bridgetown, Athlone, Cape Town, South Africa, 28 November 2025. *Photo: Gender Links*

The 2015 Barometer reported women as 39% of Seychelles police officers, 34% in South Africa and 31% in Namibia. The 2026 SGDI reports 39%, 35% and 38% respectively, while DRC remains at 6% and Mozambique at 7%. Recruitment must be matched by advancement into command and credible policing of violence. Malawi published a Police Gender Policy in 2026, while South Africa has reported women's leadership and GBV response initiatives (Malawi Police Service, 2026; SAPS, 2025).

SADC launched the Corrections/Prisons Women's Network in 2019. In 2023 SADC convened female correctional officers from 15 countries for peacebuilding and peace support training, but representation and promotion outcomes still require tracking (SADC, 2019; SADC, 2023).

A Post 2030 framework should require gender disaggregated correctional staffing data by profession, rank, leadership and deployment, alongside standards for working conditions, rehabilitation and the protection of detained women.

Figure 11.5: Women and men in peace support initiatives



Source: Gender Links (2026), SGDI 2026; source data: United Nations Peacekeeping, troop and police contributors, https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors

The UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy (2018-2028) seeks more women across military, police, justice and corrections posts. Its 2025 review reports an increase in women's share of UN uniformed peacekeepers from 4.9% (2018) to 9.8% (2024), globally, while noting barriers to deployment, leadership and safe working conditions (United Nations Peace Operations, 2025).[17]

[17] United Nations Peace Operations (2025) "Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018-2028: Review of implementation", UN Peacekeeping. Available at: https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/uniformed-gender-parity-strategy-2018-2018-full-text (Accessed: 9 October 2026).

Peace support is the weakest WPS indicator (GES 15%). Zimbabwe (35%), Namibia (25%), South Africa (19%), top the chart for women's participation in peace keeping. Madagascar 13%, Malawi and Zambia 9% each, and Tanzania 5% are at the bottom end, for those SADC countries for which data could be obtained. (Gender Links, 2026).

Peace support includes military and police deployment, civilian mission roles and agreement implementation. Local mediation also matters but is not fully captured by SGDI peace support statistics. Launched by former Malawian President Joyce Banda, SADC established its **Women Mediators Network** in January 2025 and commissioned baseline research on women in mediation and Female Engagement Teams in 2026. Priority measures include women's appointment to formal talks, representation in early warning and ceasefire arrangements, and publicly reported influence on agreements. Its success must be judged by women's appointments to negotiations, influence over agreements and access to resources (SADC, 2025).[18]

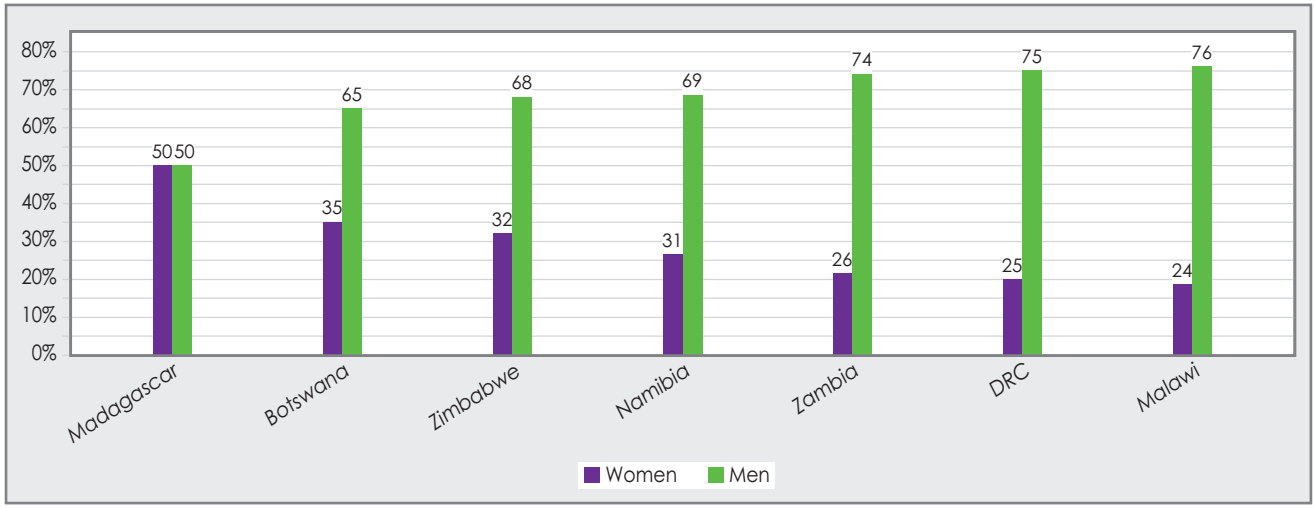


Ambassador Liberata Mulamula of Tanzania became AU Special Envoy on WPS in August 2025, following Bineta Diop. The Office advances participation, conflict prevention, mediation and accountability, including through the Continental Results Framework and engagement with women peacebuilders.[19]



The **AU Positive Masculinity Initiative** engages men and boys alongside the Office of the Special Envoy, AU gender institutions and the African Women Leaders Network. Measurable changes in prevention, protection and leadership matter more than ceremonial commitments (African Union, 2022; African Union, 2023). AU Men's Conferences on Positive Masculinity in Kinshasa (2021), Dakar (2022) and Johannesburg (2023) mobilised male leaders to challenge harmful norms and violence against women. Men's engagement should strengthen prevention and institutional accountability without displacing women's leadership.[20]

Figure 11.6: Women and men (side by side) in diplomatic services in SADC countries



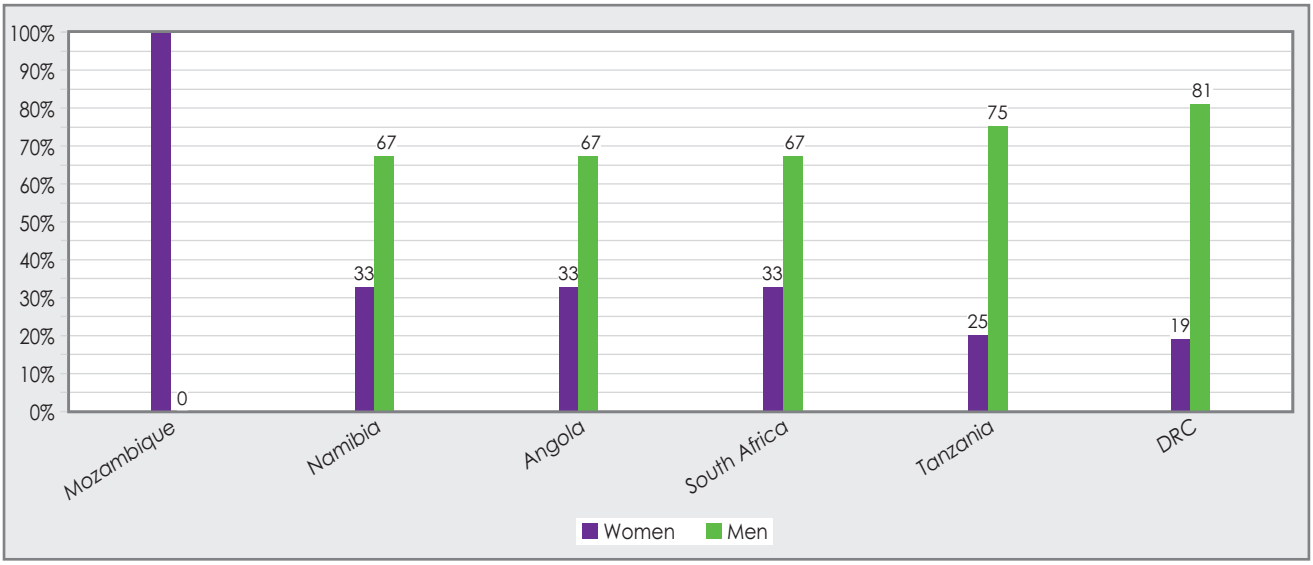
Source: Gender Links (2026), SGDI 2026; source data: Women in Diplomacy Index (2025)

[18] SADC (2025) "SADC launches the Network of Women Mediators in Southern Africa", 31 January. Available at: https://www.sadc.int/latest-news/sadc-launches-network-women-mediators-southern-africa-strengthen-womens-participation (Accessed: 13 October 2026).
[19] African Union (2025) "Chairperson of the African Union Commission Appoints Ambassador Liberata Mulamula as Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security", 26 August. Available at: https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20250826/chairperson-african-union-commission-appoints-ambassador-liberata-mulamula (Accessed: 13 October 2026).
[20] African Union (2022) "2nd Men's Conference on Positive Masculinity", 10 November. Available at: https://www.au.int/en/newsevents/20221110/2nd-mens-conference-positive-masculinity; African Union (2023) "3rd Men's Conference on Positive Masculinity", 27 November. Available at: https://au.int/en/newsevents/20231127/3rd-mens-conference-positive-masculinity-consolidating-commitments-towards (Accessed: 13 October 2026).

Diplomacy is the strongest WPS indicator (GES 64%). Women constitute 50% of diplomats in Madagascar, 35% in Botswana; 32% in Zimbabwe; 31% in Namibia; 26% in Zambia; 25% in DRC and 24% in Malawi. (Gender Links, 2026).

With 50% women in diplomacy, Madagascar ranks third in the SGDI WPS assessment. This underscores the importance of moving beyond numbers to effective participation by women in peace processes.

Figure 11.7: Women and men quoted in war, conflict and peace news



Source: Gender Links (2026), SGDI 2026; source data: Southern Africa Gender and Media Progress Study (2026)

The other WPS metric measured in the SGDI is women sources in the news on war, conflict and peace from the Southern Africa Gender and Media Progress Study 2026 which spot monitored one day's news on 28 May 2026. These ranged from 100% in Mozambique to 33% in Namibia, Angola and South Africa (33%); 25% in Tanzania and 19% in DRC (19%). Although small news samples are subject to error, the results underscore women's lack of voice in the important topic category.

From representation to effective participation

Diplomacy shapes agreements, sanctions and regional negotiation. Aanstoos (2025) links influential local women's participation in peace processes to stronger post conflict representation, demonstrating the difference between being present and exercising power.[21] Institutions, budgets and reporting are essential, but they are not outcomes in themselves. Hudson (2025) calls for a WPS agenda grounded in lived insecurity, local knowledge and structural power.



Members of the Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance question the SADC Civil Society Forum, Durban, South Africa, July 2026. *Photo: Michelle Mutogo*

[21] Aanstoos, K. (2025) "A Voice at the Table: How Women in Peace Processes Shape Political Representation", Politics & Gender, 21(3), pp. 431-461. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X2510038X (Accessed: 7 October 2026).

At Windhoek+25 in 2025, the African Union reported that 37 African countries had WPS National Action Plans and called for accountable rather than symbolic inclusion (African Union, 2025a).[22] As noted, nine SADC countries now have NAPS. These are: Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. Seychelles subsequently launched its first National Action Plan in October 2026, bringing the total to ten countries.



Namibia, with 23% women in defence, 38% in police, 31% in diplomacy and 25% in peace support hosted the historic gathering at which the AU called for meaningful rather than symbolic inclusion. Achilleos-Sarll et al. (2026) trace the Windhoek Declaration's historic role in shaping Resolution 1325.[23] Namibia's leadership is important, but the next test is women's sustained influence in command, mediation, deployments and local peacebuilding.

Armed conflict and peace processes

North and South Kivu: insecurity undermines gains in women's empowerment



Credit: Marc Fimbo

Marie-Noëlle Kabuya raising Ebola awareness among women amid ongoing armed conflict in Beni, North Kivu, eastern DRC, May 2026.

Persistent insecurity in North and South Kivu is eroding gains in women's economic and social empowerment. Fighting involving the Congolese armed forces, M23/AFC, Wazalendo and other armed groups has displaced communities, disrupted economic activity and restricted access to essential services.

Forced displacement reduces access to farmland, markets and income-generating activities. Women are often left to find new ways to support households as earning opportunities shrink. The insecurity also increases exposure to gender-based violence, forced marriage and exploitation. Disrupted health and education services further affect sexual and reproductive health and girls' schooling.

Women continue to sustain families and communities yet remain underrepresented in local governance and conflict prevention mechanisms. In Goma, "Manou"*, a journalist, wife and mother, described how separation from her husband and transaction costs reduced the money available to support the family. In Bukavu, "Gina"*, a single mother of two, shifted from selling second-hand clothing to less profitable fruit and vegetables because insecurity made restocking difficult.

The experiences show that women's economic empowerment cannot be separated from security. Recovery requires safer trade routes, access to finance, functioning services and women's participation in governance and peace processes. Without these conditions, gains remain fragile.

*Source: Lauriane Kizamina, UCOFEM DRC. *Pseudonyms used by the author*



An early African adopter of a National Action Plan on Resolution 1325, the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** has not secured women's meaningful influence over peace and security. Conflict in eastern DRC continues to expose women to displacement, sexual violence and loss of livelihoods, while formal negotiations often exclude their voices. With 3% women in defence, 6% in police, 25% in diplomacy and 19% of conflict and peace news sources; DRC scores low on WPS. Women's organisations have organised for peace since

[22] African Union (2025a) "The Windhoek Legacy: African Union Commission's Special Envoy on WPS galvanizes action for the next 25 years of Women, Peace and Security", 17 October. Available at: https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20251017/windhoek-legacy-african-union-commissions-special-envoy-wps-galvanizes-action (Accessed: 30 September 2026).
[23] Achilleos-Sarll, C. et al. (2026) "Unhappy birthday! Women, Peace and Security at 25", International Feminist Journal of Politics, 28(2), pp. 471-517. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2025.2600069 (Accessed: 7 October 2026).

the 2003 Sun City process and continue to demand representation in national, provincial and local decision making. Advocates include Grâce Lula of CAFCO, Chantal Faida of the National Gender and Parity Council and Annie Matundu.

Implementation is weakened by unpredictable financing, fragmented responsibilities and insufficient public reporting. The DRC experience shows that national plans become meaningful only when institutions share power with the women whose security they promise to protect.

Women building peace from the community upwards



The work of **Mozambique**'s Women Peace Sentinels spans violence referrals, land mediation, early warning and safe spaces (UN Women, 2026a). Mozambique faces armed conflict, displacement, electoral tensions and climate shocks. With 5% women in defence, 7% in police and no figures for women in peace support, Mozambique also scores low in the WPS SGDI.

UN Women reports 240 Women Peace Sentinels across eight districts in Cabo Delgado, Nampula, Sofala and Manica. Their work includes reporting risks, mediating community disputes and linking survivors to services (UN Women, 2026a).[24]

Of 240 Sentinels, 210 (88%) demonstrated improved conflict response capacity; 133 incidents were referred or reported to authorities, including 73 GBV cases and 23 early unions. The programme established 55 safe spaces. These are programme outputs, not population prevalence estimates (UN Women, 2026a).[25] Twelve Sentinels from Báruè and Montepuez joined district planning with government and police actors, illustrating a route from local protection to public decision making.

Lucey (2025), Mabasso (2025) and Mwedzi (2026) show the importance of women's local legitimacy, solidarity networks and mediation in Cabo Delgado. Formal representation indicators alone cannot capture this community work.[26] Effective WPS must connect these efforts with secure livelihoods, services, protection from exploitation and meaningful influence on local decisions.

Community mediation as peace infrastructure



UN Women reports that women in District Peace and Unity Committees across 19 Traditional Authority areas in **Malawi** addressed 372 disputes, including land conflicts, child marriage, trafficking and violence against women (UN Women, 2026b).[27] Community mediation is prevention: women's influence over local disputes belongs in WPS monitoring even where armed conflict is absent.



Chiwara addressing economic inequality that continues to persist.
Photo: Gender Links

[24] UN Women (2026a) "Outcome MOZ_D_4.1", UN Women Transparency Portal. Available at: https://open.unwomen.org/en/outcome-detail/XM-DAC-41146-MOZ_D_4.1 (Accessed: 9 October 2026).
[25] UN Women (2026a) "Outcome MOZ_D_4.1", UN Women Transparency Portal. Available at: https://open.unwomen.org/en/outcome-detail/XM-DAC-41146-MOZ_D_4.1 (Accessed: 9 October 2026).
[26] Lucey, A. (2025) "Perceptions of Peace Operations in Mozambique: Help or Hindrance to Negotiating a New Social Contract?", Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2024.2444076 (Accessed: 6 October 2026); Mabasso, R.A. (2025) "Mulheres e resiliência em Cabo Delgado: conflitos, superação e caminhos para paz", Faces de Eva, 53. Available at: https://doi.org/10.34619/t9mo-k6ro (Accessed: 7 October 2026); Mwedzi, T.R. (2026) "The Role of Grassroots Women in Building Durable Peace in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique", in Chivasa, N. and Mhandara, L. (eds.) Building and Sustaining Peace in Sub-Saharan Africa. Cham: Springer, pp. 243-258. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-22317-3_14 (Accessed: 7 October 2026).
[27] UN Women (2026b) "Outcome MWI_D_1.1", UN Women Transparency Portal. Available at: https://open.unwomen.org/en/outcome-detail/XM-DAC-41146-MWI_D_1.1 (Accessed: 30 September 2026).

A new WPS plan tested by an election crisis



Tanzania launched its first WPS National Action Plan (2025-2029) in August 2025, with intended implementation across ministries, regions, districts and security institutions (Tanzania Peacekeeping Training Centre, 2025).[28] Following the October 2025 election, the AU observation mission reported an internet shutdown, concerns over abductions and restrictions on information. Police Gender Desks existed, but observers also heard of delayed investigations and barriers to reporting violence (African Union, 2025b).[29]

Women comprised 32.2% of parliamentary candidates but only 9.6% of local council candidates. Tanzania's new plan must therefore address prevention, protection and women's participation during political crises (African Union, 2025b).

Tanzania: From commitments to action

TANZANIA GENDER NETWORKING PROGRAMME
Gender Equality, Equity and Social Justice

Tanzania's first National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2025-2029) establishes a costed framework and monitoring arrangements for translating the agenda into institutional practice. The plan creates opportunities to coordinate ministries, local peace structures and women's organisations, but sustained financing and implementation remain essential (Assenga, 2026).

TGNP reports that local peace committees are beginning to include women leaders and civil society representatives. Traditional and faith leaders are being engaged to challenge social norms that restrict women's participation in customary dispute resolution. Women's organisations also promote awareness of gender-based violence reporting mechanisms and scrutinise public spending on prevention and protection.

Important barriers remain. Formal security institutions and senior command structures are male dominated. Women's peace organisations face unpredictable funding, while unequal land ownership and economic insecurity can make participation in public leadership more difficult. Emerging risks for young women include technology-facilitated gender-based violence, trafficking and recruitment into violent extremism.

The contribution identifies three priorities for the Post 2030 review: measurable targets for women in security leadership and peace operations; dedicated financing for national and local plans; and stronger protection for women human rights defenders and peacebuilders. These measures would help shift WPS from formal recognition towards practical participation and accountability.

Source: Vera Assenga, Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP)



Before **Zambia**'s August 2026 election, government and UN partners launched a mechanism to report violence against women in elections (United Nations Zambia, 2026).[30] The National Prosecution Authority identified threats, harassment, physical and sexual assault, online abuse and political intimidation, and publicised referrals to police,

[28] Tanzania Peacekeeping Training Centre (2025) "TPTC hosts the launch of the National Action Plan for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda 2025-2029". Available at: https://www.tptc.go.tz/news/tptc-hosts-the-launch-of-the-national-action-plan-for-the-women-peace-and-security-agenda-2025-2029 (Accessed: 30 September 2026).
[29] African Union (2025b) "Preliminary Statement of the African Union Election Observation Mission to the October 2025 General Elections in the United Republic of Tanzania", 5 November. Available at: https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20251105/aueom-preliminary-statement-october-2025-general-elections-tanzania (Accessed: 30 September 2026).
[30] United Nations Zambia (2026) "Women Deserve Safe Elections: Zambia launches Violence Against Women in Elections Reporting Mechanism", 20 February. Available at: https://zambia.un.org/en/310580-women-deserve-safe-elections-zambia-launches-violence-against-women-elections-reporting (Accessed: 30 September 2026).

health, legal and shelter services (National Prosecution Authority of Zambia, 2026).[31] The test is whether reporting leads to timely investigation, protection and justice, enabling women to participate safely in political life.



Angola validated a second generation WPS National Action Plan in June 2025 with government, civil society and UN partners, covering participation, protection, prevention and recovery (Government of Angola, 2025a).[32] The 2025-2027 plan aims to integrate gender into defence, security and diplomacy. Angola also links WPS to its mediation role in DRC and the Great Lakes (Government of Angola, 2025b).[33] Angola scores 31 in the SGDI, with 3% women in defence, 26% in police and zero recorded peace support.



Botswana began developing its first WPS NAP in April 2026, involving security institutions and civil society (Government of Botswana, 2026).[34] Botswana scores 32% in the SGDI, with women representing 5% in defence, 24% in police and 35% in diplomacy. Its new plan provides an opportunity for funded measurable targets (Gender Links, 2026).



Women in **Seychelles** constitute 39% of police and 20% of defence personnel. In August 2026 Seychelles approved a NAP on WPS with 31 actions covering women's decision making, violence prevention, economic resilience and gender responsive recovery. A national steering committee, technical working group and focal points will guide implementation through annual work plans and budgets. Seychelles demonstrates that WPS is relevant to small island states without armed conflict. Climate preparedness, social cohesion, survivor services and women's leadership are integral to meaningful peace and security.[35]



Venessa Ikarakwu (2026) - Principal Policy Analyst, Policy and Research Division, Family & Equality Department, Ministry of Social Affairs, Family and Equality, Seychelles - is a key architect of the WPS Strategy.

Xenophobia, migration, displacement and human security



South Africa's first WPS National Action Plan (2020-2025) addresses the security of women in all their diversity. Migration related tensions in 2026 revealed continuing protection challenges (Government of South Africa, 2020).[36]

The Commission for Gender Equality warned that migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls face GBV, exploitation, discrimination and exclusion from services, and called for protection regardless of nationality (Commission for Gender Equality, 2026).[37] Medical xenophobia and community hostility can undermine safety without conventional warfare. Research by Harerimana, Pillay and Mchunu (2025) and Misago (2025) shows that exclusion from health care and xenophobic violence have interconnected institutional and political causes.[38]

[31] National Prosecution Authority of Zambia (2026) "Violence Against Women in Elections is a crime. Report it. Help is just a free call away", 29 June. Available at: https://www.npa.gov.zm/index.php/2026/06/29/violence-against-women-in-elections-is-a-crime-report-it-help-is-just-a-free-call-away/ (Accessed: 30 September 2026).
[32] Government of Angola (2025a) "Validação do Plano 1325 reforça compromisso de Angola com a igualdade de género e a paz", 20 June. Available at: https://masfamu.gov.ao/web/noticias/validacao-do-plano-1325-reforca-compromisso-de-angola-com-a-igualdade-de-genero-e-a-paz (Accessed: 30 September 2026).
[33] Government of Angola (2025b) "Ministra do MASFAMU representa o Presidente da República em Windhoek nas celebrações dos 25 anos da Resolução 1325", October. Available at: https://masfamu.gov.ao/web/noticias/ministra-do-masfamu-representa-o-presidente-da-republica-em-windhoek-nas-celebracoes-dos-25-anos-da-resolucao-1325 (Accessed: 9 October 2026).
[34] Government of Botswana (2026) "Govt to develop action plan on Women, Peace and Security", DailyNews, 23 April. Available at: https://dailynews.gov.bw/news-detail/91146 (Accessed: 30 September 2026).
[35] Government of Seychelles (2026) "Cabinet Business, Wednesday 12th August, 2026", State House Seychelles, 14 August. Available at: https://statehouse.gov.sc/news/7194/cabinet-business-wednesday-12th-august-2026 (Accessed: 9 October 2026).
[36] Government of South Africa (2020) National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2020-2025. Pretoria: Government of South Africa. Available at: https://www.gov.za/documents/other/south-african-national-action-plan-women-peace-and-security-2020-2025-18-mar-2021 (Accessed: 30 September 2026).
[37] Commission for Gender Equality (2026) "Commission for Gender Equality calls for protection of women and children amid migration-related challenges", 30 June. Available at: https://www.gov.za/news/media-statements/commission-gender-equality-calls-protection-women-and-children-amid-migration (Accessed: 6 October 2026).
[38] Harerimana, A., Pillay, J.D. and Mchunu, G. (2025) "Medical xenophobia and healthcare exclusion of refugees and migrants in Africa: A scoping review", Journal of Migration and Health, 12, 100343. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmh.2025.100343 (Accessed: 7 October 2026); Misago, J.P. (2025) "From Deprivation to Mobilization: Towards a Multideterminant Model of Xenophobic Violence in South Africa", African Human Mobility Review, 11(1). Available at: https://doi.org/10.14426/ahmr.v11i1.2363 (Accessed: 7 October 2026).

From policy to practice: Zimbabwe broadens the meaning of Women, Peace and Security



Zimbabwe's election to the UN Security Council for 2027-2028 makes its WPS commitments especially relevant. Its National Action Plan sets targets for women in foreign service, security institutions and peace support (UN Security Council, 2026; Government of Zimbabwe, 2023).[39]

The Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association (ZWLA), led by Abigail Matsvayi, is working with UN Women Zimbabwe to translate the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2023-2027) into practice. The initiative connects humanitarian response, rights protection and gender-based violence referrals.

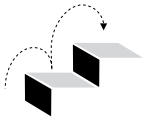
In July 2026 ZWLA convened humanitarian actors to strengthen cooperation between civil society and institutions responsible for peace, emergency response and security. Discussions examined gender responsive services, coordination and accountability.

The work has particular relevance to the return and reintegration of Zimbabweans from South Africa, when women may face barriers to shelter, services, livelihood opportunities and legal protection. Collaboration with the Civil Protection Unit could improve rapid responses and referral pathways.

Under the initiative Strengthening Institutional Capacity for Gender Equality and Inclusive Peacebuilding, ZWLA also engaged independent commissions and actors in national GBV referral systems. Its approach connects humanitarian responders, justice institutions and services often addressed separately in security policy.

Zimbabwe illustrates how Resolution 1325 can reach beyond armed conflict to displacement, migration, reintegration and everyday access to justice. These partnerships matter when they lead to better coordinated protection and allow women to influence institutional decisions.

Source: Abigail Matsvayi, Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association (ZWLA), 2026



Conclusions and recommendations

NAPs, women's mediation networks and regional frameworks have expanded, but implementation and participation remain uneven. The WPS SGDI score of 34% illustrates the distance between commitments and measurable outcomes. Diplomatic representation exceeds women's participation in peace support, while police and defence remain below parity and data gaps complicate accountability. Country evidence from DRC, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, South

[39] United Nations Security Council (2026a) "Countries elected members". Available at: https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/countries-elected-members (Accessed: 30 September 2026); United Nations Security Council (2026b) "Security Council Presidency". Available at: https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/presidency (Accessed: 9 October 2026); Government of Zimbabwe (2023) Zimbabwe National Action Plan for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security 2023-2027. Harare: Government of Zimbabwe. Copy supplied to the Barometer team.

Africa, Malawi and Zimbabwe shows how WPS links formal peace processes with everyday safety, community mediation and justice.

The Post 2030 challenge is therefore to ensure women have the power, protection, resources and institutional access to shape peace, and that Article 28 produces measurable results. To achieve this, the Post 2030 SADC Gender Protocol needs to specify WPS indicators on women in command, mediation, peace support deployments, protection from violence and gender responsive justice, while building on existing Protocol monitoring and financing commitments.

The Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance discussion paper on the Post 2030 agenda identifies gaps on early warning, conflict related sexual violence, displacement, recovery, justice, security sector accountability, financing and monitoring (Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance, 2026).[40]
The revised Article 28 should expressly address participation, prevention, protection, relief and recovery, and accountability, including electoral violence, xenophobia, climate related insecurity and digital harm.

Proposed indicators should measure women's participation in defence command, police and corrections leadership, formal mediation, peace support, and peace agreement implementation. States should publish comparable figures and report under Articles 33 and 35.

Targets must distinguish numbers from authority: women's roles in negotiations, decisions and funded prevention, access to justice, fair deployment and protection before, during and after conflict. These are proposals, not current Article 28 obligations.

Table 11.3: Proposed directions for Article 28 after 2030

Area	Evidence from the 2026 chapter	Post 2030 direction
Participation	Peace support GES is 15; defence 28; gaps between representation and operational participation.	Set measurable participation and leadership targets across mediation, peace support, diplomacy, police, defence and peace processes.
Prevention	Election-related violence, misinformation, xenophobia and community disputes show insecurity before armed conflict.	Require gender responsive early warning, prevention, community mediation and social cohesion mechanisms.
Protection	Conflict, displacement and migration related tensions expose women to violence and denial of services.	Explicitly cover conflict-related sexual violence, displacement, refugees, migrants and access to essential services and justice.
Relief and recovery	DRC and Mozambique show the links between security, livelihoods, services and women's economic resilience.	Include gender responsive humanitarian action, recovery, reconstruction and women's economic security.
Accountability	NAP adoption and data availability are uneven; financing and public reporting are not consistently visible.	Require costed national plans, dedicated budget lines, indicators, annual reporting and regional review.
Data	Several SGDI indicators have missing national observations.	Require comparable sex-disaggregated data across security institutions, peace processes and community peacebuilding.

Source: Gender Links (2026); Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance (2026); sources cited in this chapter

[40] Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance (2026) Draft 1 Discussion Paper Post 2030: SADC Gender Protocol - From policy to action and results. Unpublished working paper supplied to the editorial team.



Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance members discussing the 2030 campaign in Johannesburg, August 2026. *Photo: Thandokuhle Dlamini*

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