

STRATEGIC NOTE

UN WOMEN EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

2026-2029



 **UN
WOMEN** 

 **FOR ALL
WOMEN
AND GIRLS**

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INTRODUCTION

The East and Southern Africa (ESA) Regional Strategic Note (2026–2029) outlines UN Women’s vision to advance gender equality and empower women and girls across 25 diverse countries.

ESA has witnessed notable democratic progress in recent decades, with majorly peaceful electoral transitions and increasing participation of women in political leadership and decision-making. The region is home to two female Heads of State in Namibia and Tanzania, and leads the world in women’s parliamentary representation, with Rwanda recording the highest proportion of women parliamentarians globally. These gains reflect strong advocacy, progressive legal and policy reforms, and sustained efforts by women’s movements and institutions to advance gender equality. In an increasingly complex and contested global environment for gender equality, UN Women ESARO positions itself not only as a technical partner, but as a system-wide enabler and accountability driver, supporting the UN development system to deliver coherent, results-oriented and sustainable progress on gender equality and women’s empowerment.

The region possesses untapped potential due to its young population, particularly young women and girls, who could drive economic growth, innovation, and sustainable development. Harnessing this potential will be critical to achieving inclusive societies and resilient economies.

However, progress remains uneven and fragile. The region continues to face evolving peace and security challenges stemming from political instability, competition over natural resources, widening economic inequalities, pervasive violence, climate-induced shocks, and recurrent humanitarian and displacement crises. These challenges are compounded by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, discriminatory laws and practices, and structural barriers that continue to limit women’s rights, agency, and access to resources.


Anchored in global, continental, and regional normative frameworks, the Strategic Note prioritizes women’s leadership and participation, women’s economic empowerment, the elimination of violence against women and girls, strengthened gender data and statistics, and gender-responsive peace, security, and humanitarian action to achieve transformative change for women and girls.

GENDER EQUALITY SNAPSHOT EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

Gender inequality in East and Southern Africa remains structural and multi-dimensional, cutting across economic participation, access to services, political representation, and exposure to violence. These interconnected challenges require coordinated, system-wide responses that go beyond sectoral interventions.

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING

10 countries have
≥ 30 %
women in parliament;
Rwanda leads with 63.8% (2024).



14 countries use
quotas/reserved
seats.



6 election bodies have
gender policies with
32%
addressing violence
against women in politics.



WOMEN, PEACE & SECURITY / HUMANITARIAN ACTION

15 Member States
are implementing
National Action Plans
on UNSCR 1325.



Four Regional Economic
Communities - IGAD, SADC,
ICGLR and the EAC have
adopted Regional Action
Plans on WPS agenda.



Conflict-related sexual
violence remains a
grave protection crisis
across Ethiopia, South
Sudan, Somalia, and
Sudan.
Over
12.1M
are at risk of GBV in Sudan,
mainly women and girls.



People in
humanitarian need:
83,182,928




Displaced people:
17,876,705
(IDPs, refugees and
asylum seekers).



ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS


Intimate partner
violence (lifetime):
~30 %
of women (27%
globally).



Femicide:
22,600
women and girls in
Africa (2024).



58%
of female
Parliamentarians in
Africa experienced
online abuse (2021).




17
countries have developed
National Action Plans on
EVAWG/GBV.




WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

~390M
people are in extreme poverty
(representing 52.8% of total
population).



Raw gender pay gap in the
region is
19%
**Women earn 81 cents per
\$1 earned by men (hourly).**
Adjusted pay gap (controlling
for age, education, job type):
**Women earn 92 cents per \$1
earned by men.**



Women in SubSaharan
Africa spend on
average about
4 hours
per day on **unpaid
care and domestic
work** (caregiving,
chores, etc.) which
is about roughly **28
hours per week.**

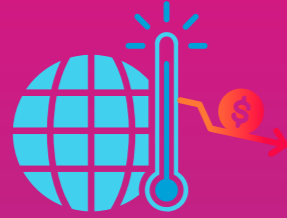


CLIMATE, ENVIRONMENT

Climate losses: result in

~2–5%

of GDP loss annually.



Women are

50–60%

of agricultural labour force with constrained access to assets.



DEMOGRAPHICS, EDUCATION & FINANCING

Population:

~587 M

>70% under 30.



Women and girls accounted for

62%

of all new HIV infections, with the highest rates found in the 5 South African Customs Union Countries.



Gender parity almost achieved in primary education, but only

44%

of girls complete lower secondary and

27%

finish upper secondary.



Youth unemployment rate in region:

7.2%

higher for young women than men.



UN WOMEN STRATEGIC NOTE: A ROADMAP TO GENDER EQUALITY

The Strategic Note (SN) articulates the multi-year strategy, rationale, envisioned results, targets, and resource requirements for a UN Women Office. In essence, the SN provides a roadmap for improving the lives of women and girls in the context where UN Women operates. It is developed in consultation with key partners and in alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), UN Women's Strategic Plan and key national, regional, and global gender-equality priorities. SNs are funded by a combination of core and non-core resources.

UN Women's triple mandate—normative, coordination, and operational—is implemented in an integrated manner, with coordination serving as a critical lever to ensure system-wide coherence, accountability, and impact.



RESULTS ACHIEVED (2022-2025)

To learn more about the work and results of UN Women East and Southern Africa (ESA), visit our Transparency Portal at [Regional Presence UN Women Transparency Portal](#)

A harmonized, higher-quality framework for measuring gender and SDG indicators in Africa was achieved through the development and rollout of standardized Minimum Set of Gender indicators for Africa (MSGIA) metadata, guidance, and training—building capacity across 32 African countries, institutionalizing adoption through COMESA, and establishing sustained regional and inter-agency collaboration to strengthen gender-responsive SDG reporting.

Strengthened women's leadership and inclusion in peace processes by supporting IGAD's Regional Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 (2023–2030), enhancing accountability and policy coherence across the region, and enabling the meaningful participation of over 400 Sudanese women from 14 states in inclusive political dialogue and the ongoing peace process. Through sustained advocacy, Sudanese women secured a 50% representation demand, shaping major regional and international peace dialogues, and the subsequent establishment of a dedicated technical committee to institutionalize women's voices in Sudan's peace negotiations.

UN Women's support expanded access to care services and care-related employment, enabling over 300,000 people to access essential care, supporting nearly 17,000 women to increase income and economic participation, and strengthening community and institutional capacity to advance household resilience and inclusive economic growth across the region.

USD 271 million awarded to women via affirmative public procurement in Kenya (FY 2024/25)

By mid-2025, 18 UNCTs in ESAR had successfully mainstreamed gender equality across planning and results frameworks.

186,630 women and girls accessed survivor-centered essential services across nine countries.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM DELIVERING THE 2022-25 STRATEGIC NOTE

Partnerships were often short-term and not clearly defined. UN Women ESA Regional Office is shifting to longer-term partnerships with agreed roles, shared results, and simple monitoring, starting with a partnership mapping to identify priority partners across the public and private sectors.

Corporate commitments to mainstream youth, disability, and intersectionality were not consistently implemented, and partnerships with organizations representing these groups were uneven. The Regional Office is responding by taking a deliberate, cross-thematic approach, backed by resources, clearer accountability, and routine tracking.

Coordination efforts were not always supported by clear accountability mechanisms and consistent follow-through at country level, particularly in non-presence contexts. The Regional Office is addressing this through a more structured coordination model with defined roles, performance tracking, and strengthened feedback loops between regional and country levels.

UN WOMEN PRIORITIES IN THE REGION

The priorities are anchored on the Beijing+30 Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals, the AU Agenda 2063, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and AU Conventions and Protocols for the advancement of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. Prioritization and refinement of objectives was further shaped through extensive consultations with key stakeholders.

PRIORITY 1: ENGAGE CIVIL SOCIETY, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND UN ENTITIES TO ACCELERATE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR GENDER COMMITMENTS, WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND DECISION MAKING

To address the mixed results, reverse the stagnation or decline in women's political representation in leadership and decision making across East and Southern Africa, the Regional Office will catalyse regional accountability for gender equality commitments by convening civil society, regional and national institutions, and UN partners around a shared, action-oriented agenda for women's leadership and decision-making. Building on global and regional normative frameworks including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women General Recommendation 40 to advance equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems in all sectors, the Maputo Protocol, as well as SADC & EAC instruments, the Regional Office will advocate for gender parity and inclusive decision-making systems across all sectors.



This will include strengthening capacities and providing coordinated support to country offices, regional institutions, regional economic communities and member states to promote inclusive electoral laws, policies, strategies, and political party reforms. The Regional Office will also support high level advocacy to advance women's political participation, build women's leadership capacities, facilitate peer learning among electoral and political stakeholders and promote harmonized gender parity targets, shared accountability benchmarks, and collective problem-solving across the region.



PRIORITY 2: INTEGRATE GENDER EQUALITY AND PROMOTE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN PREVENTION, RESPONSE, AND RECOVERY EFFORTS FROM VIOLENT CONFLICT, HUMANITARIAN CRISES AND CLIMATE RELATED RISKS

To respond to humanitarian crises and conflicts that disproportionately affect women and girls, UN Women East and Southern Africa Regional Office will foster an enabling environment for the realization of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee standards, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. The Regional Office will support Regional Economic Communities, Regional Mechanisms, and Member States to reinforce institutional capacities and accountability for Women, Peace and Security and for humanitarian action commitments.



It will also facilitate women's participation in peace, security, and humanitarian action; invest in gender-integrated conflict analysis and data; and advance economic recovery, protection and prevention of violence against women and girls, and women's leadership by operationalizing the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and placing women's voices at the center of localized efforts.

PRIORITY 3: REDUCE STRUCTURAL AND SYSTEMATIC BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

To address persistent inequalities faced by women, such as limited access to employment, low earnings, lack of decent work, and disproportionate care responsibilities, UN Women East and Southern Africa Regional Office will promote gender-responsive climate action and resilience, with agriculture as a central component, while supporting women's entry into blue, green, digital, and care economies.



expand access to finance for women-led enterprises; strengthen gender-responsive regional integration and market access by coordinating with regional economic communities, including the African Continental Free Trade Area; and advance women's economic participation by advocating for increased public and private investment.

In addition, the Regional Office will deepen partnerships with international financial institutions, development banks, governments, and the private sector to

PRIORITY 4: ENHANCE STATE AND REGIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY, INVESTMENTS IN VAWG PREVENTION AND RESPONSE, INCLUDING THE RATIFICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AU-CEVAWG

To address the persistence of multiple forms of violence against women and girls, UN Women East and Southern Africa Regional Office will mobilize political will and strengthen accountability for existing commitments through regional bodies and mechanisms.



systematic strategies in support of resilient feminist movements.

It will enhance institutional capacities and provide strategic policy guidance to regional actors toward increased financing and delivery of comprehensive, evidence-informed approaches to ending VAWG, while strengthening collaboration with civil society and

The Regional Office will also promote intersectional approaches that address the needs of marginalized women and girls, generate evidence, innovative tools, and knowledge to inform policy and social norm change and improve coordination at multiple levels across the United Nations system, the African Union, regional economic communities and the wider ecosystem of EVAWG actors.

STRATEGIC NOTE IMPACT, OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

Impact: Women and girls in ESAR enjoy their full human rights, live free from violence and discrimination, and thrive in inclusive, gender-equal and peaceful societies.



1. Global, regional, and national norms and standards are protected, strengthened, implemented, and reported on to advance the rights of women and girls in ESAR.

Output 1.1: Laws, policies, and frameworks developed, reviewed, adopted and implemented through integrated policy support to regional institutions and Countries in line with international and regional norms and standards.

Output 1.2: Women's networks, movements, and multi-stakeholder platforms are strengthened to influence and advance gender-responsive policies that promote women's and girls' rights and equitable access to essential services and opportunities.

Output 1.3: RECs and affiliated bodies have strengthened coordination and accountability mechanisms to domesticate, track and accelerate implementation of gender-related continental and international normative frameworks across Member States.



2. Regional and national institutions in ESAR are accountable to all women and girls through financing, data and practices that support gender equality.

Output 2.1: Gender data systems and capacities of institutions to produce, analyze and use gender statistics strengthened at regional and country levels.

Output 2.2: Institutional mechanisms for monitoring, reporting and accountability, including gender financing, on gender equality commitments are strengthened at regional and national levels.

Output 2.3: UN system-wide and regional coordination platforms are strengthened to enhance coherence, drive mutual accountability, and facilitate joint programming for gender-transformative results in UNSDCFs and humanitarian frameworks.

Output 2.4: Targeted capacity development programmes are delivered to policymakers in selected countries to support the scaling of care innovations and the advancement of minimum care policy standards.



3. More women and girls in ESAR exercise their agency, are resilient and have equitable access to quality services, resources and assets.

Output 3.1: Women's rights, youth and civil society organizations have strengthened capacities, resources and agency to hold duty-bearers accountable for GEWE commitments.

Output 3.2: UN joint programmes, regional projects and country-based initiatives managed by the Regional Office are effectively implemented to advance women's and girls' agency, resilience, and access to quality services and resources.

KEY APPROACHES



Integrated and Tailored Support for Impact

- Provide demand-driven, structured and differentiated support to country offices, programme presence and non-presence countries.
- Champion an integrated policy support model and cross-thematic/unit programme approaches
- Emphasize performance management and gender-responsive data to drive clearer results and credible reporting.
- Draw on evidence from high-quality evaluations to scale successful approaches and maximize impact.
- Operationalize a system-wide coordination model for consistent application of gender equality standards, tools, and accountability frameworks across all UNCTs, including in non-presence contexts.



Partnerships and Communications

- Elevate UN Women's impact by mobilizing resources and partnerships, positioning the organization as the voice, advocate, partner, and brand for gender equality.
- Position UN Women as a strategic collaborator with donors, public, private sector and IFI partners, creating alliances to influence practice, inform policies and financing decisions for GEWE.
- Use communications and advocacy as a strategic lever for advancing gender equality and women's rights, driving policy influence, shaping public discourse, and amplifying the voices and leadership of women and girls across the region.
- Strengthen institutional systems through deep collaboration with WROs, CSOs, RECs, and UN agencies for sustainable impact.
- Leverage regional coordination platforms to align partnerships, reduce duplication, and promote joint resource.



Business processes and Compliance

- Streamline business processes and improvement of systems-based internal controls
- Provide tailored technical and capacity support to strengthen planning, implementation, and accountability across programmes.
- Strengthen oversight and second line of defence through targeted and risk-informed missions to ensure compliance and accountability.



Knowledge Management

- Guided by the UN Women ESAR Knowledge Management Strategy (2026–2029), position KM as a core enabler of normative, operational and coordination results across all programme areas.
- Generate and synthesize demand-driven, user-centred knowledge and strengthen South–South exchange and Communities of Practice to promote cross-thematic learning, innovation and scaling of effective programme solutions.
- Leverage digital platforms and AI tools to accelerate knowledge workflows, enhance access to institutional memory and reduce duplication across programmes.
- Embed robust quality assurance, ethics and learning mechanisms to ensure knowledge is trusted, applied and delivering impact across the full Strategic Note.
- Leverage the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, the Women Count initiative, and gender data systems to support evidence-based policy dialogue.

REGIONAL COORDINATION STRATEGY

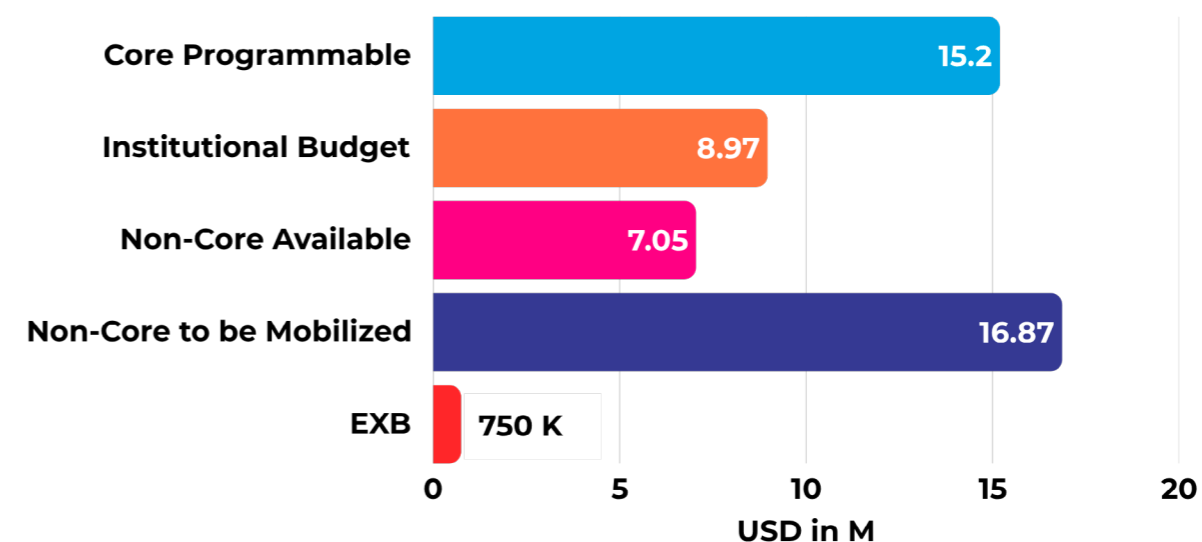
UN Women exercises a clear coordination mandate in East and Southern Africa, driving system-wide coherence, accountability, and results for gender equality across the UN Development System. Through the Regional Office, UN Women ensures that gender equality is systematically integrated into Common Country Analyses (CCAs), UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs), humanitarian responses, and joint programming

This role is operationalized through the [ESARO Coordination Strategy \(2026–2029\)](#), which strengthens alignment, performance, and accountability across UN Country Teams (UNCTs). Central to this approach is the strengthening of Gender Theme Groups (GTGs)

and the application of systemwide accountability frameworks, including the UNCT-SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard and the Gender Equality Marker (GEM), to track performance, financing, and results.

Going forward, UN Women will further strengthen genderresponsive financing, system-wide monitoring and reporting, and the translation of coordination into measurable results. Through this integrated approach, UN Women positions the Regional Office as a system enabler and accountability driver, ensuring that gender equality commitments translate into measurable, scalable, and sustained results across the region.

TOTAL RESOURCES REQUIRED FOR THE STRATEGIC NOTE



BECOMING A PARTNER – UN WOMEN EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

Achieving gender equality and the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 in East and Southern Africa demands transformative, collaborative action.

HOW PARTNERS CAN ENGAGE

Direct Strategic Note Funding: Softly earmarked by geography, these funds are flexible and predictable, enabling UN Women to allocate resources to high-impact priorities and respond to emerging needs such as conflict-related displacement or climate disasters. Direct SN funding strengthens UN Women's ability to scale results and sustain transformative change.

Project-Specific Funding: Tightly earmarked for targeted initiatives within the Strategic Note, such as women's economic empowerment, ending violence against women and girls advancing women's leadership, contributions and influence in decision making and women, peace and security commitments.

Non-financial contributions: including supplies, technical expertise, to help UN Women meet the needs of women and girls in the region.

Strategic partnerships: especially with private companies that unlock opportunities for women and girls.

Country Office funding: through multi-country and regional programmes.

WHY INVEST?

Strategic Note funding supports underfunded yet critical areas—interventions for shifting discriminatory social norms, gender data systems, UN coordination on gender, and institutional capacity building. It enables UN Women to:

- Embed gender equality across UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and humanitarian response plans.
- Drive regional integration and policy innovation through partnerships with the African Union, Regional Economic Communities, and private sector actors.
- Expand access to finance for women-led enterprises and promote gender-responsive climate resilience.

By committing to SN funding, partners help deliver gender-transformative results at scale, strengthen accountability for continental frameworks like the AU Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, and amplify women's political voice and agency so they can actively influence and contribute to national and regional politics, governance, and decision-making shaping peacebuilding, recovery, and inclusive economic growth.

INVEST IN IMPACT. PARTNER WITH UN WOMEN EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS TOWARD A GENDER-EQUAL REGION.

UN Women ESARO expresses sincere gratitude to our partners:



UN WOMEN EXISTS TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S RIGHTS, GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS.

As the lead United Nations entity on gender equality and secretariat of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, we shift laws, institutions, social norms and services to close the gender gap and build an equal world for all women and girls. Our partnerships with governments, women's movements and the private sector, coupled with our coordination of the broader United Nations, deliver lasting changes. We make strides in four areas: leadership, economic empowerment, freedom from violence, and peace, security and humanitarian action.

UN Women keeps the rights of women and girls at the centre of global progress – always, everywhere. Because gender equality is not just what we do. It is who we are.

East and Southern Africa Regional Office

UN Gigiri Complex, UN Avenue;

Block N, Ground Floor

P.O. Box 30218-00100 Nairobi, Kenya

Tel: +254 20 762 4365

Email Address: esaro.publications@unwomen.org

www.unwomenafrica.org

Facebook: [UN Women Africa](https://www.facebook.com/UNWomenAfrica)

X (Formely Twitter): [@unwomenafrica](https://twitter.com/unwomenafrica)

Linkedin: [UN Women East and Southern Africa](https://www.linkedin.com/company/unwomen-east-and-southern-africa)

