

# Eastern & Southern Africa

**Women, Business and the Law (WBL)** is a World Bank Group flagship initiative providing comparable data on laws and policies impacting women's economic participation to drive jobs, productivity, and economic growth. Economies with higher WBL scores tend to have higher female labor force participation rates, more women business owners and managers, and narrower gender wage gaps.

Women in the Eastern & Southern Africa region have less than two thirds (60.6%) of the economic rights afforded to men. Only about a third of mechanisms (33.4%) are in place to support the implementation of laws. Experts in the region perceive that women's economic rights are enforced at less than half (45.8%) of their full potential.

## Reform Highlights from October 2023 to October 2025



**Eight economies in the Eastern and Southern Africa region have enacted reforms to provide women with greater access to economic opportunities.**



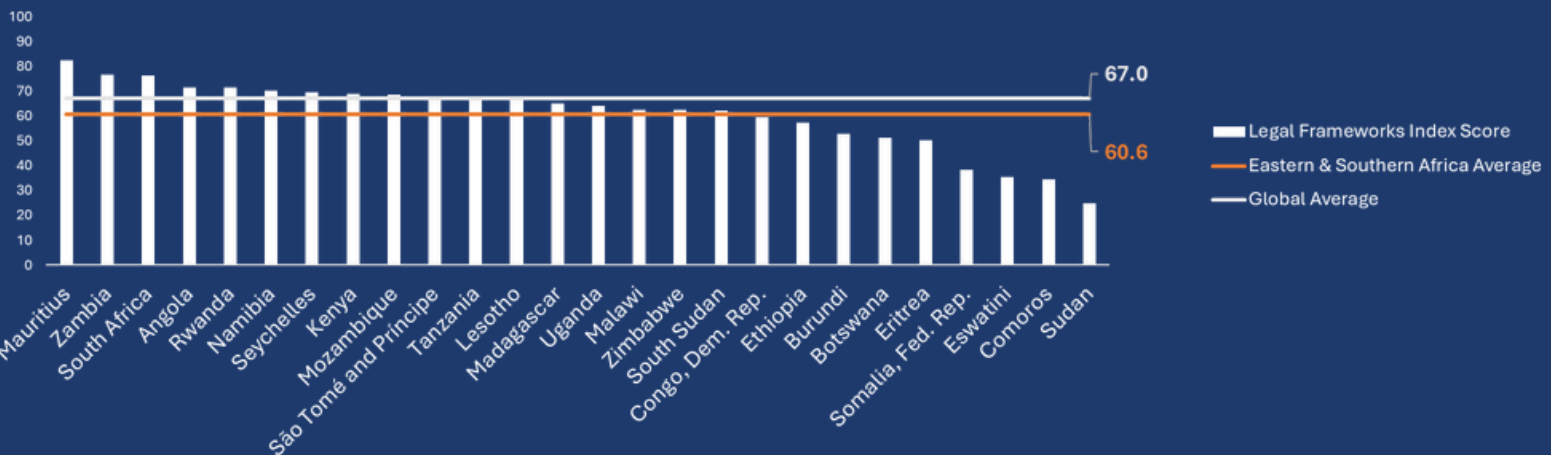
In August 2024, **Madagascar** prohibited discrimination, ensured equal pay, flexible work, and paternity leave.



In December 2023, **Zambia** raised the minimum age of marriage to 18.

[Click here](#) for a full list of reforms

## Legal Frameworks Index Scores for Eastern & Southern Africa - WBL 2026 Index



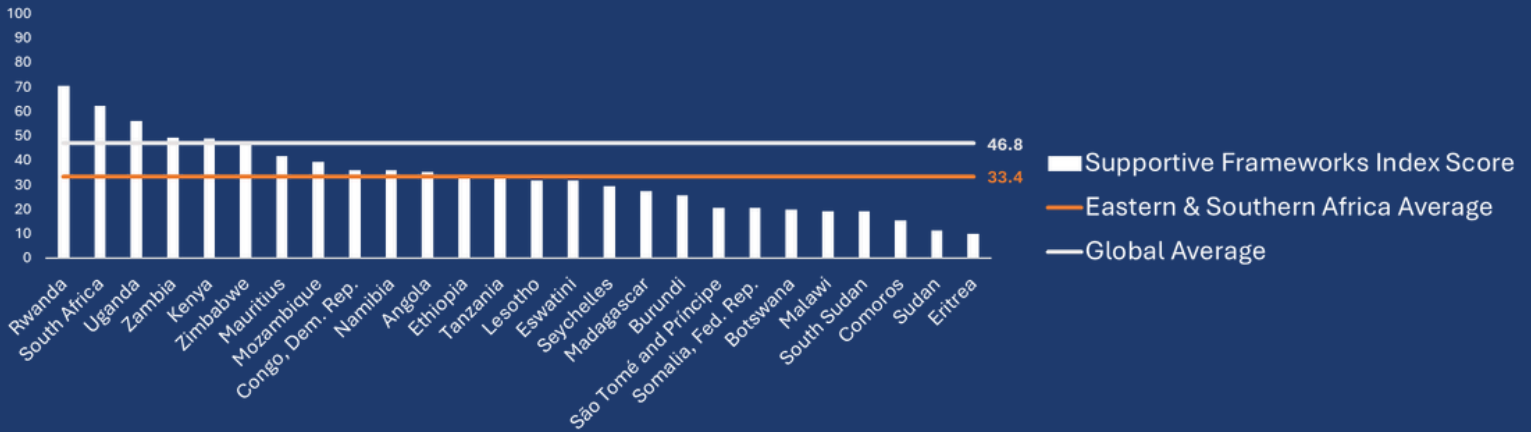
## Legal Frameworks: Measuring equal rights and explicit restrictions on women's work and entrepreneurship

- Across the region, nine economies, including **Mauritius** and **Zambia**, perform above the global average, indicating relatively strong legal frameworks promoting women's access to economic opportunities.
- The **Mobility** and **Pension** topics perform well with average regional scores of 88.5 and 84.1, respectively.
- The **Childcare** and **Safety** topics show the most room for improvement with average scores of 27.9 and 27.4, respectively, indicating persistent gaps in childcare laws and laws protecting women from violence. To close such gaps, economies could establish affordable, high-quality childcare services, and introduce comprehensive laws addressing child marriage.

## Good Practice Legal and Supportive Frameworks

- **Angola** is one of two economies in the region with legislation establishing quality standards that cover all three basic quality parameters for childcare services, including structural, workforce, and quality assurance.
- **Mauritius** is the only economy in the region that provides awareness-raising measures on fair recruitment policies free from discrimination based on gender.

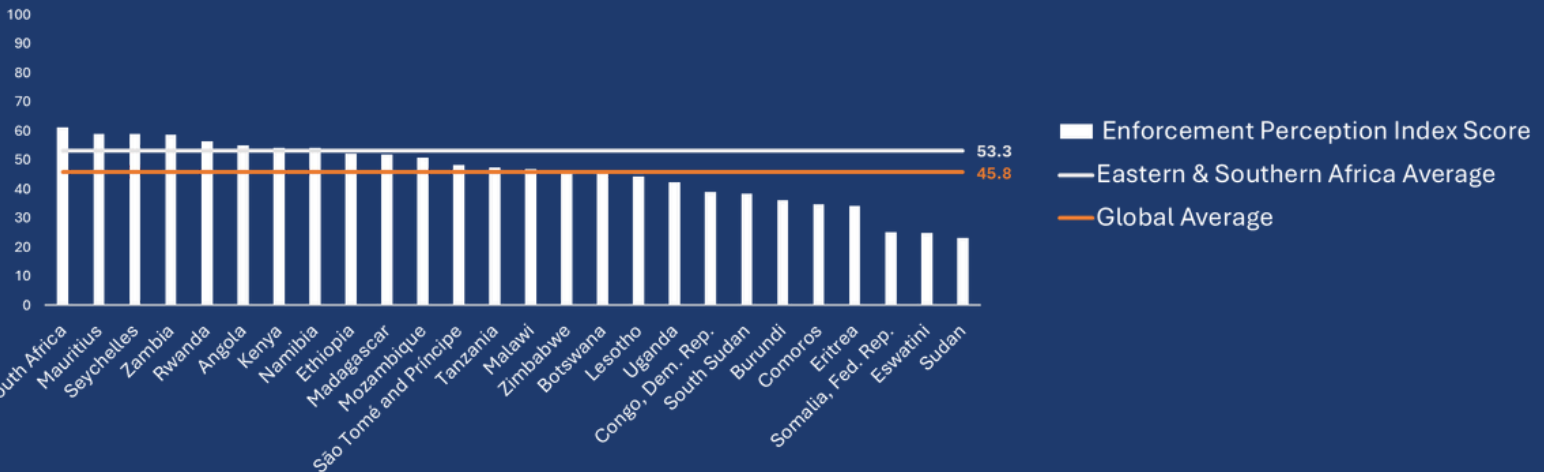
Supportive Frameworks Index Scores for Eastern & Southern Africa - WBL 2026



**Supportive Frameworks:** Examining policy instruments designed to support the implementation of laws

- Across the region, policies and institutions to implement equal opportunity laws are strongest in **Rwanda, South Africa, and Uganda**. Most room for improvement remains in **Sudan and Eritrea**.
- The **Mobility** and **Marriage** topics perform relatively well with average regional scores of 69.7 and 40.4, respectively.
- The **Parenthood** and **Childcare** topics show the most room for improvement with average regional scores of 16.4 and 7.2, respectively, indicating gaps in policies and institutions supporting women’s participation in the labor force after having children and the availability, affordability, and quality of center-based childcare. To close such gaps, economies could publish anonymized sex disaggregated data on unpaid care work and reports on the quality of childcare services.

Enforcement Perceptions Index Scores for Eastern & Southern Africa - WBL 2026



**Enforcement Perceptions:** Evaluating expert views of how well public authorities enforce laws in practice

- **South Africa** is the highest scoring economy (61.2%) in the region suggesting that laws protecting women’s economic rights are enforced more than half of the time. Lowest enforcement levels are perceived in **Eswatini** and **Sudan**.
- Across the region, experts assess the enforcement of women’s right to **Safety** at only 14.5% of their full potential and the enforcement of **Childcare** laws at only 12.9% of their full potential.