

Press Release

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The status of women in South Africa: A mixed bag of success and failure

Today the South African Institute of Race Relations released its August Fast Facts *Wathint' Abafazi, wathint' Imbokodo*. The data reveals a mixed bag of success and failure.

At the household level the provinces with the highest proportion of female-headed houses are the Eastern Cape (51.2%), Limpopo (49.4%) and KwaZulu Natal (47.4%).

In terms of household tenure, across all race groups more females than males live in households that they own and have fully paid off. In particular 65.9% of black females have households which are owned and fully paid off as compared to 46.9% of black men.

Life expectancy of South Africa's female population fares poorly against other countries. The proportion of female children born in 2016 expected to survive to the age of 65 and older in South Africa is 48.6% compared to 65% in Botswana, 50.2% in Mozambique and 58.5% in Uganda. South Africa fares even worse compared to its BRIC counterparts- the proportion in Brazil is 84.5%, China 86.9% and India 73.7%.

In education the picture, however, looks better for women. Females account for 51.35% of the population aged 20 and older who have completed grade 12, and 52.9% of the population aged 20 and older who have completed post-school education.

Yet, female involvement in the labour market is low. The female labour market participation rate is 51.7% whereas the male labour market participation rate stands at 69.5%. Also, employment in management remains skewed in favour of men, with only 21.5% of females holding positions in top management, for instance.

Electorally it would seem women have a voice in South Africa's politics. 54.9% of registered voters are female. Although South Africa has never had a female president, it has one of the highest representation rates of women within parliament. 41.7% of South Africa's MPs are women compared to 15.8% in Botswana, 17.4% in Ghana and 12% in Nigeria. But it is not only relative to African counterparts where South Africa fares well; in Australia the proportion of female MPs stands at 24.1%, Germany 33.3% and the United Kingdom at 30.8%.

As victims of crime adult females (54%) and children (39%) tend to be victims of sexual offences whereas adult males more often are disproportionately victims of murder (82%) and serious assault (65%). Since 1995 to the present under 3% of the prison population has been female.

IRR research analyst, Unathi Matwasa, concludes that, "while progress can be seen, there is a need for a further upturn in the socio-economic status of women in South Africa. Accordingly, policy focus should be aimed at a more inclusive economy, including the safety and security of women."

Ends.