

Beyond Representation

Assessing Gender Mainstreaming in the South African Parliament

A ParliMeter Gender Mainstreaming Review

2026



Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Methodology.....	2
3. Context of Gender representation.....	4
3.1. Gender and political representation in South Africa.....	4
3.2. Gender representation in Parliament	5
3.3. Representation in the National Council of Provinces.....	7
4. Gender Representation Within Parliamentary Committees	8
4.1. International Examples of Gender Mainstreaming in Parliamentary Committees.....	12
4.2. Measuring Gender Mainstreaming Through the Indicators for Democratic Parliaments	12
4.3. Creating Gender-Responsive Governance.....	15
4.4. Gender Oversight Beyond Traditional Gender Portfolios	19
4.5. Strengthening Gender Mainstreaming Through BRRR Processes.....	22
5. Gender-Responsive Budgeting and Financial Oversight: Ensuring Public Resources Advance Gender Equality	23
5.1. International Context: The Global Evolution of Gender-Responsive Budgeting.....	25
5.1.1. Austria: A Constitutional Commitment to Gender Budgeting	25
5.1.2. Canada: Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+).....	25
5.2. South African Context: Progress and Challenges in Gender-Responsive Budgeting.....	26
6. Priorities of a gender focused democracy	30
7. Recommendations: Strengthening Gender Mainstreaming in Parliament	34
7.1. Establish a Comprehensive Gender Mainstreaming Framework Across Parliament.....	35
7.2. Make Gender Analysis a Standard Requirement Across All Parliamentary Work.....	36
7.3. Establish a Public Gender Accountability Tracker	36
7.4. Institutionalise Gender-Responsive Budgeting Within Parliamentary Financial Oversight	37
7.5. Strengthen Women’s Participation and Influence in Parliamentary Leadership.....	37

7.6.	Strengthen Public Participation to Include Marginalised Women’s Voices	38
7.7.	Strengthen Gender-Disaggregated Data and Evidence-Based Oversight	38
8.	The way forward: Expanding Understanding of Gender Mainstreaming in Parliament	440
9.	Final Reflection	440
10.	Glossary and Abbreviations.....	442
11.	References.....	444

List of Figures

Figure 1	Gender Representation in Parliament	6
Figure 2	Gender-related questions posed to Ministers	17
Figure 3	Case study: Canada's Gender-Based Analysis Plus Framework	26
Figure 4	Case study: South Africa's Women's Budget Initiative	27
Figure 5	Reform priorities to strengthen GRB	29
Figure 6	Priorities for a Gender-responsive Parliament	33
Figure 7	Recommendations to Strengthen Parliament’s Constitutional Role in Gender Equality	39

This report was compiled by OUTA’s Parliamentary Engagement Office:

- Robyn Pasensie, Parliamentary Project Manager

Disclaimer

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information in this report. However, OUTA accepts no responsibility for any errors, omissions or losses arising from its use. The inclusion of any specific companies, commercial products, trade names or otherwise does not constitute or imply its endorsement or recommendation by OUTA or any of its partners. Generative AI was used to support the creation of some images and to assist with technical and grammatical edits.

This report is co-funded by the EU Delegation in South Africa, under their Enhancing Accountability Programme towards promoting accountability and transparency in South Africa. In 2024, the Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse (OUTA) partnered with OpenUp and the Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG) to develop ParliMeter. This open-source platform aims to enhance transparency and real-time monitoring of parliamentary activities. Data derived from ParliMeter is used in this report.

1. Introduction

South Africa has developed a strong constitutional and legislative foundation for gender equality. The Constitution establishes equality as a fundamental democratic principle, while Parliament has created dedicated structures such as the Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, the Multi-Party Women's Caucus and mechanisms for engaging with institutions such as the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE). These structures have played an important role in ensuring that gender-related issues remain visible within parliamentary processes.

However, the existence of gender policies, specialised committees and significant numbers of women representatives does not automatically mean that Parliament has achieved full gender mainstreaming. Effective mainstreaming requires gender considerations to influence routine decision-making across all parliamentary structures. It requires committees to examine how legislation, budgets and government programs affect women and men differently, supported by reliable gender-disaggregated data and measurable indicators.

The assessment of Parliament's gender mainstreaming performance shows that Parliament has made important progress in recognising gender equality as a democratic priority. However, implementation remains uneven. Gender considerations are often strongest within specialised gender structures, while their integration into sector committees, budget processes and broader oversight systems remains incomplete.

Gender mainstreaming requires Parliament to move beyond treating gender equality as a specialised issue managed only by gender-focused structures and instead integrate gender considerations into every aspect of its constitutional mandate. This includes Parliament's legislative function, oversight of the Executive, budget scrutiny, public participation processes, institutional governance and internal workplace practices.

This report evaluates gender mainstreaming in Parliament by examining women's representation, committee participation, parliamentary oversight, gender-related questions to Ministers, budget scrutiny, institutional practices and opportunities for strengthening accountability.

Women's political representation is one of the most visible indicators of progress towards gender equality in democratic institutions. The participation of women in legislatures is significant because parliaments are not only spaces where laws are passed, but also institutions where national priorities are debated, public resources are allocated and government performance is scrutinised. When women are absent or significantly underrepresented in these spaces, democratic institutions risk excluding the experiences and perspectives of half the population from decisions that directly affect society.

The importance of women's representation is rooted in the principle of descriptive and substantive representation. Descriptive representation refers to the extent to which elected institutions reflect the demographic composition of society, including gender, race, ethnicity and other forms of diversity. Substantive representation refers to whether representatives advance policies and decisions that address the interests, concerns and lived realities of the communities they represent. Political scientists such as Anne Phillips (1995), in her work on the "politics of presence", argue that the inclusion of historically excluded groups in decision-making spaces is essential because social experiences influence how political issues are understood and prioritised. Similarly, Hanna Pitkin's (1967) foundational work on representation distinguishes between simply having representatives who resemble the population and ensuring that representation results in meaningful advocacy and policy outcomes.

From this perspective, women's participation in Parliament is not only a question of fairness or equality of opportunity; it is also a question of democratic effectiveness. Women and men often experience social and economic policies differently due to historical inequalities, gender roles and unequal access to resources. Issues such as gender-based violence, maternal healthcare, childcare responsibilities, women's economic participation, workplace discrimination and access to land and property rights are examples of areas where women's experiences have historically influenced policy priorities. The presence of women in legislatures creates greater opportunities for these issues to be raised, debated and incorporated into public policy.

2. Methodology

This assessment examines the extent to which gender mainstreaming has been incorporated into the work of the South African Parliament. The assessment draws on ParliMeter's analysis of parliamentary composition, committee structures, parliamentary questions, and Budgetary Review and

Recommendation Reports (BRRRs) covering the period 2019–2025¹. The methodology combines quantitative analysis of parliamentary data with qualitative assessment of parliamentary practices and institutional processes. The purpose is not only to measure the visibility of gender issues within Parliament, but also to evaluate whether gender considerations are integrated into legislative oversight, budget scrutiny and accountability mechanisms.

The assessment evaluates four primary dimensions of parliamentary gender mainstreaming.

First, the report examines women’s representation within Parliament, including representation within the National Assembly (NA) and National Council of Provinces (NCOP). Representation is assessed through the distinction between descriptive representation, referring to the numerical presence of women within political institutions, and substantive representation, referring to the extent to which institutional processes reflect and respond to gender equality concerns.

Second, the assessment analyses gender representation within parliamentary committees. Committees represent a critical area of parliamentary influence because they conduct detailed oversight of government departments, scrutinise legislation, evaluate budgets and develop recommendations. Committee-level analysis considers whether women are represented across policy areas and whether gender equality is integrated beyond committees specifically responsible for women’s issues.

Third, the assessment examines parliamentary oversight through analysis of gender-related questions directed to Ministers between February 2025 and July 2026. Gender-related questions were identified where the substance of the question directly addressed gender equality, women’s rights, gender-based violence, women’s economic participation, representation, or the gendered impact of government policy.

Fourth, the assessment analyses Budget Review and Recommendation Reports between 2019 and 2025. BRRR recommendations were coded according to whether they explicitly addressed gender-related outcomes, gender-disaggregated data, representation, budgeting, service delivery, institutional accountability or implementation monitoring.

The assessment therefore evaluates not only whether Parliament raises gender concerns, but whether parliamentary processes demonstrate the institutional characteristics required for effective gender mainstreaming. These include consistent gender analysis, evidence-based oversight, accountability

¹ BRRRs are released from October each year. 2026 BRRRs are yet to be released.

mechanisms and the ability to monitor whether government action produces measurable improvements in gender equality outcomes.

The assessment is informed by international gender mainstreaming frameworks, including the United Nations Beijing Platform for Action (1995), feminist institutional approaches to political representation, and gender-responsive budgeting literature. These frameworks provide the basis for evaluating whether Parliament has moved beyond recognising gender equality as a policy objective towards embedding gender considerations within routine institutional practice.

3. Context of Gender representation

3.1. Gender and political representation in South Africa

South Africa has achieved comparatively high levels of women's representation when measured against many legislatures globally. This progress reflects both the country's constitutional commitment to equality and the institutional choices made during the transition to democracy. The adoption of a proportional representation electoral system after 1994 created conditions that supported greater inclusion of women in Parliament. Unlike constituency-based electoral systems where individual candidates compete for election in geographical districts, South Africa's party-list proportional representation system allows political parties to determine candidate lists and has enabled parties to introduce mechanisms aimed at improving women's representation.

The African National Congress (ANC), which has historically been the governing party since 1994, introduced voluntary gender quotas on its electoral lists, including the adoption of a 30% quota for women candidates in the early democratic period and later moving towards a 50% representation target. These commitments contributed significantly to increasing the number of women elected to Parliament. The broader constitutional environment also reinforced this trajectory. Section 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa establishes equality as a fundamental right and permits measures designed to address historical disadvantage, providing a foundation for gender transformation within public institutions. The grounding of gender equality within the South African constitution provides us with a clear point that our democracy is predicated upon the realisation of gender equality.

South Africa's experience reflects a wider African trend. Across the continent, several countries have achieved relatively high levels of women's parliamentary representation through a combination of

electoral systems, constitutional commitments and gender quotas. Rwanda, for example, has consistently ranked among the countries with the highest proportion of women parliamentarians globally. Following the 1994 genocide, Rwanda adopted constitutional provisions requiring that women hold at least 30% of decision-making positions, alongside reserved seats for women in Parliament. As a result, women have exceeded this minimum threshold and have become a majority in the Rwandan Parliament. Rwanda's experience demonstrates how institutional mechanisms can rapidly transform women's numerical presence in political institutions. Similarly, countries such as Senegal, Namibia and Mozambique have implemented quota mechanisms or party commitments that have increased women's representation. These examples demonstrate that women's representation does not increase automatically through democratic development alone; deliberate political choices, institutional reforms and party commitments are often required to overcome longstanding structural barriers.

Internationally, progress has also been uneven. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), women continue to represent a minority of parliamentarians globally, although their representation has steadily increased over recent decades. The IPU has consistently highlighted that women's representation remains essential to democratic legitimacy because legislatures should reflect the societies they govern. Despite improvements, many countries continue to face barriers including discriminatory political cultures, unequal access to party nomination processes, limited financial resources for women candidates and gender-based harassment within political institutions.

3.2. Gender representation in Parliament

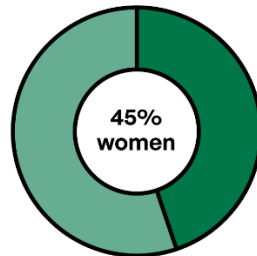
According to ParliMeter the National Assembly (NA) consisted of 177 female Members of Parliament (MPS) and 218 male MPs in June 2026. Women therefore accounted for approximately 45% of the NA. This represents a significant achievement in ensuring that women are present within South Africa's primary legislative chamber. This level of representation places South Africa among the countries with comparatively high levels of women's parliamentary participation internationally. It reflects decades of political transformation and demonstrates the impact of deliberate efforts to improve women's inclusion in democratic institutions.

Gender Mainstreaming in Parliament

Female representation in the Houses of Parliament

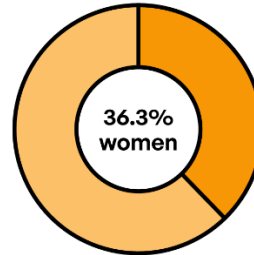


National Assembly



Female: 177 Male: 218

National Council of Provinces



Female: 20 Male: 33

 ParliMeter

Statistics from June 2026
www.parlimeter.org.za

Figure 1 Gender Representation in Parliament

However, numerical representation should not be viewed as the final measure of gender equality. While having more women in Parliament is an important achievement, gender mainstreaming requires attention to whether women have equal opportunities to influence parliamentary priorities, legislative agendas and oversight decisions. Research on political representation demonstrates that increasing the number of women representatives does not automatically eliminate institutional inequalities or guarantee that gender equality concerns will consistently shape political outcomes. For example, women parliamentarians may face barriers related to political party structures, access to leadership positions, committee influence and informal decision-making networks. International research by the IPU has highlighted that women politicians frequently experience gender-based discrimination, harassment and unequal access to political resources. These challenges affect not only individual women representatives but also the ability of legislatures to function as fully inclusive democratic institutions.

In South Africa, this distinction between representation and influence remains important. Women may constitute a significant proportion of Parliament, but gender mainstreaming requires examining whether women occupy positions where they can shape parliamentary priorities. This includes leadership positions such as committee chairs, party leadership structures, parliamentary management bodies and positions responsible for determining legislative programs. The issue is particularly important because

parliamentary committees are where much of Parliament's substantive work takes place. Committees determine oversight priorities, examine departmental performance, review legislation and make recommendations to government. Ensuring that women participate meaningfully within these structures is therefore essential for transforming representation into influence.

3.3. Representation in the National Council of Provinces

The National Council of Provinces (NCOP) reflects a different pattern of gender representation. According to ParliMeter in June 2026, the NCOP consisted of 20 female delegates and 33 male delegates. While women continue to participate meaningfully in the chamber, their representation is lower than in the NA. The difference between the two Houses illustrates that progress towards gender equality is not always uniform across parliamentary institutions. Although South Africa has achieved significant gains, maintaining gender balance requires continuous attention across all democratic structures.

The NCOP has a distinct constitutional role because it represents provincial interests and provides a mechanism for provinces to participate in national legislative processes. Ensuring women's representation in this chamber is therefore particularly important because provincial governance directly affects service delivery areas that have significant gender dimensions, including healthcare, education, housing, rural development and social services. Women's participation at provincial and local government levels is equally important because many issues affecting women's daily lives are experienced through municipalities and provincial administrations. Access to water, sanitation, public transport, community safety, healthcare facilities and social support services are areas where gender-sensitive governance can have direct consequences for women's wellbeing.

South Africa's experience demonstrates that increasing women's representation is a necessary but insufficient step towards achieving gender equality in democratic governance. The presence of women in Parliament changes the composition of political institutions, but gender mainstreaming requires that women also have equal authority, influence and decision-making power.

A gender-responsive Parliament must therefore ask broader questions:

- I. Are women equally represented in leadership positions?*
- II. Do parliamentary committees consistently consider gender implications in their work?*
- III. Are women's experiences reflected in legislation, budgets and oversight processes?*

IV. Are institutional cultures enabling women to participate fully and equally?

The international evidence suggests that representation matters most when it leads to transformation in political priorities and public outcomes. Countries that have successfully increased women's participation demonstrate that quotas, electoral systems and political commitments can create pathways for women's inclusion. However, lasting equality requires institutions to address deeper structural barriers that limit women's influence.

For South Africa, the next stage of parliamentary gender transformation is therefore not only about ensuring that women have seats in Parliament, but ensuring that women have equal power to shape the decisions made within those seats. Gender mainstreaming requires a transition from women's presence in Parliament to women's influence within Parliament. This distinction is central to building a democratic institution that reflects South Africa's constitutional commitment to equality, dignity and inclusive governance.

4. Gender Representation Within Parliamentary Committees

Parliamentary committees are among the most important sites of democratic decision-making. While plenary debates provide public visibility, committees are where much of Parliament's substantive work occurs. They examine legislation clause by clause, scrutinise government budgets, evaluate departmental performance, conduct public hearings, engage with affected communities and develop recommendations that shape government action. For this reason, the gender composition and functioning of parliamentary committees have significant implications for whether democratic institutions are able to recognise and respond to the different experiences, needs and realities of women and men.

Gender representation within committees must therefore be understood not simply as a question of numerical balance, but as part of a broader process of gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming refers to the systematic integration of gender considerations into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programs and institutional practices.²

² The definition is based on the ECOSOC agreed conclusions, which describe gender mainstreaming as the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, across all areas and levels. United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (1997) *Report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997*. New York: United Nations.

The concept emerged internationally through the United Nations (UN) system, particularly following the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, where governments committed to incorporating gender perspectives across all areas of public policy rather than treating women's equality as a separate policy concern.

The Beijing Platform for Action³ defined gender mainstreaming as a strategy through which governments and institutions assess the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programs. The underlying principle is that gender equality cannot be achieved through isolated interventions targeting women alone; rather, every institution, policy area and decision-making process must consider how gender inequalities are produced, maintained or reduced. Within parliamentary systems, gender mainstreaming therefore requires committees to examine how laws, budgets and government programs affect women and men differently. It requires MPs to ask not only whether government is delivering services, but also whether those services are equally accessible, whether they address historical inequalities and whether they contribute towards achieving constitutional commitments to equality.

The importance of gender representation within parliamentary committees is supported by theories of political representation and feminist institutionalism. Traditional approaches to democracy often assume that elected representatives can represent all citizens regardless of their identity or social background. However, feminist scholars have challenged this assumption by demonstrating that political institutions are not neutral spaces; they are shaped by historical patterns of power, social norms and unequal access to decision-making.

Anne Phillips' theory of the "politics of presence" argues that the inclusion of historically excluded groups within political institutions matters because lived experiences influence how political issues are understood and prioritised. Women's participation does not mean that all women share identical views or automatically represent all women's interests. Rather, women's presence increases the likelihood that previously overlooked experiences and concerns enter political debates. Similarly, Iris Marion Young's

³ United Nations (1995) *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. Adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, China, 4–15 September 1995. New York: United Nations. Available at: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>

(2000) work on inclusion and democratic communication argues that democratic legitimacy depends on ensuring that different social perspectives have meaningful opportunities to influence collective decisions. From this perspective, gender diversity strengthens democracy because it broadens the range of experiences considered during policymaking.

However, feminist institutional scholars such as Mona Lena Krook and Fiona Mackay caution that increasing the number of women in institutions does not necessarily transform institutional cultures or decision-making processes. Institutions may continue to operate according to practices, norms and expectations that favour traditionally dominant groups. This distinction is particularly relevant to parliamentary committees. A committee may achieve numerical gender balance while still failing to incorporate gender perspectives into its oversight work, legislative analysis or budget recommendations. Gender mainstreaming therefore requires both descriptive representation (women's presence) and substantive representation (ensuring that gender equality considerations influence decisions and outcomes).

ParliMeter demonstrates that gender representation varies significantly across parliamentary committees. Some committees have stronger female participation, particularly those dealing with social policy areas. The Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities has maintained a strong female presence, reflecting the importance of women's leadership within a committee specifically mandated to address gender equality, youth development and disability inclusion. Similarly, committees responsible for Social Development, Tourism, Public Works and Science and Innovation have demonstrated stronger female representation. The stronger participation of women within these areas reflects broader social patterns internationally, where women are often more represented in policy fields associated with care, social welfare and community development.

However, this pattern also highlights an important challenge. When women are concentrated primarily in committees dealing with social issues, it can reinforce the perception that gender equality is a specialised area rather than a responsibility that applies across all areas of governance. Gender inequality is not limited to issues traditionally labelled as "women's issues". Decisions made by committees responsible for finance, policing, defence, infrastructure, transport, mining, agriculture and economic development all have gender implications.

For example, infrastructure decisions affect women because women are often responsible for household care work and may experience transport systems, public facilities and access to basic services differently from men. A road development project, public transport policy or urban planning decision may influence women's safety, mobility and economic participation. Likewise economic and finance committees influence issues such as employment opportunities, procurement policies, access to credit and support for small businesses. Women-owned enterprises often face greater barriers in accessing markets, finance and government procurement opportunities. A budget decision that appears gender-neutral may therefore have unequal effects on women and men.

The same applies to policing and justice. Gender-based violence (GBV) cannot be understood only as a criminal justice issue. Committee oversight of police services, prosecution systems and correctional services must consider whether institutions respond effectively to violence against women, whether victims have access to support and whether prevention measures are adequately funded.

ParliMeter identifies continued gender imbalance in committees dealing with sectors traditionally associated with male dominance, including defence, policing, finance, transport, mining and infrastructure.

These patterns reflect broader social and institutional inequalities. Historically, technical, economic and security-related fields have often been associated with masculine expertise, while women have been encouraged or expected to participate in areas associated with care and social responsibility. These gendered assumptions influence educational pathways, professional opportunities, political recruitment and leadership patterns.

International research has demonstrated that women remain underrepresented in many areas of political decision-making, particularly within economic, security and foreign affairs institutions. The IPU has repeatedly identified that women parliamentarians are often overrepresented in committees dealing with social affairs, health and education, while men remain more dominant in committees dealing with defence, finance and economic policy. This pattern is not unique to South Africa. In many legislatures, women's political participation has increased, but gender segregation within parliamentary roles remains a challenge. Achieving numerical representation within a legislature does not automatically eliminate gendered divisions within institutional structures.

4.1. International Examples of Gender Mainstreaming in Parliamentary Committees

Several countries have attempted to address these challenges by embedding gender mainstreaming into parliamentary processes. In Sweden, widely regarded as a global leader in gender equality, gender mainstreaming has been incorporated across government institutions and parliamentary work. Swedish parliamentary committees are expected to consider gender implications when developing policies and reviewing government action. Gender analysis is not restricted to committees dealing with equality issues; rather, it is treated as a responsibility across all policy areas.

The European Parliament has similarly adopted gender mainstreaming approaches. Parliamentary committees are encouraged to consider gender impacts in legislative processes, and gender impact assessments are used to evaluate whether proposed policies may reinforce or reduce inequalities.

In Canada, parliamentary committees have increasingly incorporated gender-based analysis into policy oversight through the Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) framework. This approach requires policymakers to examine how factors such as gender, race, disability, age and socioeconomic status influence experiences of government policies. The approach recognises that policies which appear neutral can produce unequal outcomes if they do not consider different social realities. These examples demonstrate that gender mainstreaming requires institutional mechanisms, not only commitments. Without processes, indicators and accountability systems, gender equality risks becoming an aspirational principle rather than an operational practice.

The composition and functioning of parliamentary committees directly influences the extent to which gender equality is incorporated into oversight processes. Where committees lack gender analysis capacity or fail to request gender-disaggregated information, budget and policy oversight may reproduce existing inequalities. The analysis of Budget Review and Recommendation Reports demonstrates that while committees increasingly identify gender-related concerns, the institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming remains uneven.

4.2. Measuring Gender Mainstreaming Through the Indicators for Democratic Parliaments

The international examples demonstrate that successful gender mainstreaming requires more than political commitment or the presence of women within decision-making institutions. It requires clear institutional mechanisms, indicators and accountability processes that enable organisations to measure progress and identify areas requiring improvement. In this regard, the development of institutional and international indicators provides an important mechanism for assessing whether gender equality has been embedded within parliamentary practice.

In the South African context, ParliMeter's assessment of Parliament against the Indicators for Democratic Parliaments (IDPs) provides a useful framework for examining the institutional conditions necessary for gender mainstreaming. The IDPs, developed by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in partnership with parliamentary organisations, provide a comprehensive self-assessment framework designed to evaluate parliamentary performance against democratic standards relating to effectiveness, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, inclusiveness, participation and representation. ParliMeter applied this framework from a civil society perspective to assess South Africa's Parliament's performance across these dimensions.

Although the IDPs are not exclusively a gender assessment framework, several of their dimensions directly relate to the requirements of a gender-responsive Parliament. Gender mainstreaming requires institutions that are representative, inclusive, participatory, accountable and responsive to the diverse needs of society. These are precisely the institutional characteristics measured through the IDP framework.

The Representative Parliament dimension is particularly relevant to gender mainstreaming because it examines whether Parliament reflects the diversity of the society it represents and whether representation extends beyond numerical inclusion towards meaningful participation in parliamentary processes. ParliMeter's assessment highlights that representation must not only be measured through electoral outcomes but also through the composition of parliamentary bodies, leadership structures and decision-making spaces. This aligns closely with feminist theories of representation, which distinguish between descriptive representation (the presence of women within institutions) and substantive representation (the extent to which women's experiences and interests influence political outcomes). This distinction is central to understanding gender mainstreaming within Parliament. South Africa has achieved significant levels of women's representation, yet gender equality requires examining whether

women participate equally in influential parliamentary structures, whether committees reflect diverse perspectives and whether women's voices shape legislative priorities. ParliMeter's IDP assessment similarly emphasises that representation should not only be assessed by who occupies parliamentary seats, but whether different groups are able to meaningfully influence parliamentary decisions.

The Inclusive Parliament dimension provides another important connection to gender mainstreaming. An inclusive Parliament is one where legislative processes, oversight activities and institutional practices reflect the needs and experiences of diverse communities, particularly marginalised and underrepresented groups. ParliMeter's assessment highlights that inclusion requires more than formal opportunities for participation; it requires addressing structural, procedural and socio-economic barriers that prevent meaningful engagement.

This is particularly relevant to gender mainstreaming because women do not experience inequality in uniform ways. Gender intersects with race, class, disability, geography and economic status. A gender-responsive Parliament must therefore consider whether parliamentary processes are accessible to rural women, women with disabilities, young women and other groups whose voices may remain underrepresented. The intersectional approach reflected in frameworks such as Canada's Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) is consistent with the IDP emphasis on inclusive democratic participation.

The Participatory Parliament dimension also provides an important indicator for assessing gender responsiveness. Gender mainstreaming requires that women and women's organisations are not only represented within Parliament but are also able to influence parliamentary processes through public participation mechanisms. ParliMeter's assessment found that while Parliament has established formal mechanisms for public engagement, participation remains uneven, particularly for rural and marginalised communities. This presents an important challenge for gender-responsive governance because barriers to participation can prevent the experiences of vulnerable women from informing legislation, oversight and budgeting processes.

Similarly, the Accountable Parliament and Effective Parliament dimensions highlight the importance of institutional systems that allow Parliament to monitor whether commitments translate into action. Gender mainstreaming requires accountability mechanisms that track whether gender-related recommendations are implemented, whether departments provide gender-disaggregated information

and whether parliamentary oversight results in improved outcomes. ParliMeter's IDP assessment identifies accountability, monitoring and evaluation as essential components of a functioning democratic institution.

The relevance of the IDP framework for gender mainstreaming is therefore that it shifts analysis beyond isolated gender initiatives and towards the broader institutional environment in which equality is pursued. A Parliament cannot become gender-responsive simply because it has women Members of Parliament or a dedicated committee responsible for gender equality. Gender responsiveness requires institutional systems that support inclusive representation, evidence-based oversight, meaningful participation and transparent accountability.

Viewed through this lens, the ParliMeter IDP assessment provides an important foundation for developing a gender mainstreaming measurement framework for Parliament. Existing IDP dimensions could be further strengthened through gender-specific indicators, including:

- whether women are proportionally represented across parliamentary committees and leadership structures;
- whether committees routinely apply gender analysis within legislation, oversight and budget processes;
- whether parliamentary recommendations include measurable gender outcomes;
- whether government departments provide gender-disaggregated data for oversight purposes;
- whether public participation mechanisms effectively include marginalised women's voices.

Such an approach would enable Parliament to assess gender mainstreaming not only as a policy commitment but as an institutional practice. It would allow progress to be measured over time and would provide a mechanism for identifying areas where further reform is required.

4.3. Creating Gender-Responsive Governance

The central challenge for Parliament is therefore moving beyond the assumption that the presence of women automatically produces gender equality. Women's representation is a necessary foundation for inclusive democracy, but gender mainstreaming requires deeper institutional transformation. Committees must ensure that women participate across all areas of governance, including those

traditionally dominated by men. They must also ensure that gender considerations influence how legislation is developed, how budgets are scrutinised and how government performance is evaluated.

The goal is not to create separate spaces where gender equality is discussed, but to ensure that gender equality becomes embedded within the everyday functioning of Parliament. For South Africa, this represents the next stage of democratic transformation: moving from women's inclusion within parliamentary structures towards a Parliament where all committees consistently recognise, analyse and respond to the gendered realities of society. A gender-responsive Parliament is therefore not one where only women's committees address gender issues. It is one where every committee understands that gender equality is fundamental to effective oversight, accountable governance and constitutional democracy.

Parliament's oversight function is one of the most important mechanisms through which democratic institutions can advance gender equality. While legislation establishes the framework for protecting rights and promoting equality, oversight enables Parliament to test whether government policies, programs and budgets are achieving meaningful outcomes for women and other vulnerable groups. Through written and oral questions to Ministers, committee hearings, departmental briefings, budget reviews and annual performance assessments, Parliament has the ability to require the Executive to explain how it is responding to gender inequalities and whether government interventions are producing measurable improvements.

In the context of gender mainstreaming, parliamentary oversight is particularly important because many gender inequalities are not addressed through a single government programme or department. Issues affecting women's lives cut across policing, justice, health, education, employment, housing, economic development and social protection. A gender-responsive Parliament must therefore ensure that gender considerations are embedded across all oversight activities rather than being treated as the responsibility of only those institutions with an explicit gender mandate.

Gender Mainstreaming in Parliament

Gender-related questions posed to Ministers

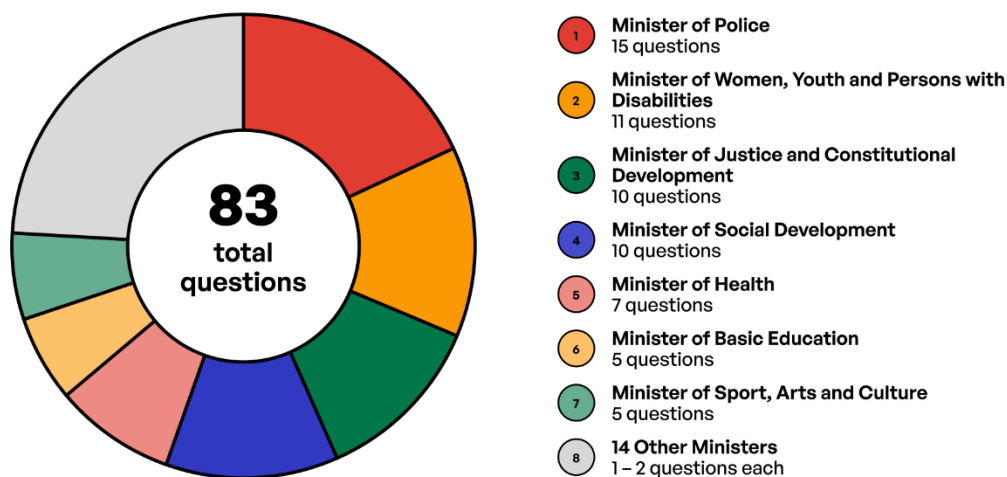


Figure 2 Gender-related questions posed to Ministers

A review of Parliament focusing on gender, shows that 83 gender-related parliamentary questions were directed to Ministers between February 2025 and July 2026. These questions demonstrate that MPs continue to use oversight mechanisms to raise concerns about gender inequality, particularly in relation to GBV, access to justice, social protection and the implementation of government commitments to women's empowerment. However, the distribution of these questions also reveals important patterns about how Parliament currently understands and prioritises gender-related oversight. While gender issues appear across multiple government portfolios, they remain concentrated within a limited number of departments, particularly those traditionally associated with social protection, policing and justice.

The highest number of gender-related questions was directed to the Minister of Police, with 15 questions recorded during the review period. This reflects the central role that policing plays in South Africa's response to GBV, which remains one of the country's most persistent human rights challenges. Questions directed to the Minister of Police focused on issues such as the effectiveness of police responses to violence against women, the functioning of specialised police services, victim support mechanisms,

investigations into sexual offences and the implementation of measures intended to improve accountability within the South African Police Service (SAPS). This is of course also reflective of the current socio-political context where GBV continues to be a nationally pressing issue.

The concentration of parliamentary questions within the policing portfolio reflects an important reality: GBV is often experienced by victims through the criminal justice system. The first point of contact for many survivors is the police service, making police responsiveness, professionalism and accountability essential components of a gender-responsive state. However, the focus on policing also highlights a broader challenge. GBV cannot be addressed only through law enforcement responses. While effective policing is essential, prevention and long-term reduction of violence require interventions across education, economic empowerment, healthcare, social development and community-based support systems. For example, a survivor's ability to leave an abusive relationship may depend not only on whether police respond effectively, but also on whether she has access to safe housing, financial independence, childcare support, healthcare services and employment opportunities. A gender-responsive oversight approach must therefore examine the entire ecosystem of government responses rather than focusing only on criminal justice outcomes.

The Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities received 11 gender-related questions during the review period. This reflects Parliament's continued focus on the institution responsible for coordinating national gender equality policy and monitoring government commitments towards women's empowerment. Questions directed to this portfolio are particularly significant because the Department has a coordinating rather than purely service-delivery role. The effectiveness of gender mainstreaming depends partly on whether the department can ensure that gender considerations are integrated across government.

Parliamentary oversight in this area is therefore important in assessing whether gender equality commitments translate into measurable government action. This includes questions relating to women's economic empowerment, gender-responsive planning, government compliance with gender policies and coordination between departments. The challenge for this portfolio is that responsibility for advancing gender equality cannot rest solely with the Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities. While the department provides leadership and coordination, every Minister and government department has responsibilities relating to gender equality.

A gender mainstreamed approach requires Parliament to move beyond asking whether the dedicated women's ministry is addressing gender issues and instead ask whether every department is fulfilling its gender responsibilities.

The Ministers of Justice and Constitutional Development and Social Development each received 10 gender-related questions during the review period. The prominence of these portfolios reflects the interconnected nature of gender inequality and the need for coordinated government responses. Questions directed to the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development reflect concerns around access to justice, prosecution of gender-based violence cases, legal protections for survivors and the effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

South Africa has introduced significant legislative reforms aimed at strengthening protections against GBV, including amendments to legislation dealing with domestic violence and sexual offences. However, legislation alone does not guarantee implementation. Parliamentary oversight is therefore essential in examining whether laws are effectively enforced, whether institutions have adequate capacity and whether survivors experience improved access to justice. Similarly, questions directed to the Minister of Social Development highlight the importance of social protection systems in addressing gender inequality. Social development programs play an important role in supporting women experiencing poverty, vulnerability and violence. Many women rely on social assistance, community support programs and protective services, particularly where economic dependence increases vulnerability.

The connection between social protection and gender equality is recognised internationally. Research by organisations such as UN Women and the World Bank has demonstrated that women's economic insecurity can increase exposure to exploitation and violence, while access to social protection and economic opportunities can strengthen women's autonomy and decision-making power.

4.4. Gender Oversight Beyond Traditional Gender Portfolios

Although the distribution of parliamentary questions demonstrates attention to important gender-related concerns, ParliMeter data also highlights a key limitation: gender oversight remains concentrated within a relatively small number of portfolios. The presence of gender-related questions in policing, justice and social development demonstrates Parliament's recognition that gender inequality requires government

action. However, a fully gender mainstreamed Parliament requires every committee and portfolio to consider how its area of oversight affects women and men differently.

The ParliMeter data demonstrates that Parliament is actively using oversight mechanisms to raise gender-related concerns. The 83 gender-related questions recorded between February 2025 and July 2026 indicate that MPs recognise gender inequality as an issue requiring Executive accountability. However, the next stage of gender mainstreaming requires Parliament to strengthen the consistency and depth of gender oversight. This means moving beyond asking questions about gender-specific programs and ensuring that all parliamentary oversight processes consider gender impacts.

A mature gender-responsive oversight system would require committees to routinely ask:

- I. How does this department's budget affect women and men differently?*
- II. Does this policy reduce or reinforce existing inequalities?*
- III. Are government programs reaching women, including rural women, women with disabilities and economically marginalised women?*
- IV. Are departments collecting and reporting gender-disaggregated data to measure outcomes?*
- V. Are parliamentary recommendations resulting in measurable improvements?*

The role of Parliament is therefore not only to identify gender inequalities but also to ensure that government action addresses them. Effective gender mainstreaming requires oversight that follows the full policy cycle: identifying inequalities, examining government responses, monitoring implementation and evaluating whether interventions improve the lives of women.

Parliament has established an important foundation for gender-responsive oversight. The continuing challenge is to ensure that gender equality becomes a standard feature of all parliamentary accountability processes rather than an issue addressed primarily through selected portfolios. A truly gender-responsive Parliament is one where every committee recognises that its work has gender implications and where every Minister is held.

Parliamentary committees are the primary mechanisms through which the legislature exercises detailed oversight over the Executive. While parliamentary questions provide an important mechanism for holding

Ministers accountable, committees provide the space where government performance is examined in greater depth through Budget Review and Recommendation Reports (BRRRs), departmental briefings, annual performance plan assessments, budget hearings and oversight visits.

For gender mainstreaming to be effective, gender considerations must therefore be embedded within committee processes and programs. It is within committees that Parliament determines whether government departments are identifying gender inequalities, allocating resources equitably, implementing gender-related commitments and achieving measurable improvements in the lives of women.

The ParliMeter assessment of parliamentary BRRRs between 2019 and 2025 provides important insight into how gender has been incorporated into parliamentary oversight. The analysis identified 94 gender-related recommendations or observations across the committee system during this period. These findings demonstrate that Parliament has increasingly recognised that gender equality is not limited to the work of the Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, but is relevant across multiple areas of government performance.

The recommendations identified through BRRRs addressed a wide range of issues, including gender-based violence, women's economic participation, employment equity, procurement opportunities, women's representation in leadership positions, access to public services, gender-responsive planning and the collection of gender-disaggregated data. This represents an important shift in parliamentary practice because it reflects a move away from viewing gender equality as a narrow social policy issue towards understanding gender as a cross-cutting governance concern.

Approximately 41 of the 94 recommendations required departments to provide additional information, including reporting, monitoring, evaluation, data collection, audits, dashboards or departmental briefings. This indicates that committees increasingly recognise the importance of evidence-based oversight. Rather than simply acknowledging gender inequalities, Parliament has begun requiring departments to provide measurable information about who benefits from government programs, how resources are allocated and whether gender-related commitments are being implemented.

Despite the progress reflected in the BRRR analysis, the assessment identifies a significant weakness in parliamentary gender oversight: the gap between recommendations and implementation. The evidence demonstrates that Parliament frequently identifies gender inequalities and requests additional information from departments. However, it is less consistent in demonstrating whether departments complied with these requests, whether corrective action was taken or whether government interventions improved outcomes for women. This creates a challenge for accountability. A recommendation without follow-up risks becoming an administrative exercise rather than a mechanism for institutional change. If a committee repeatedly requests gender-disaggregated employment data from a department, the critical accountability question is not only whether the department eventually submits information. The question is whether the information changes oversight decisions, informs corrective measures or improves representation outcomes. Similarly, if a committee identifies weaknesses in a GBV programme, accountability requires tracking whether additional resources were allocated, whether implementation improved and whether survivors experienced better access to services.

International parliamentary oversight practices increasingly emphasise the importance of recommendation tracking systems. Legislatures in countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand have developed stronger mechanisms for monitoring government responses to parliamentary recommendations. These approaches recognise that oversight effectiveness depends not only on identifying problems but also on ensuring that institutions respond.

For South Africa, strengthening gender mainstreaming requires Parliament to move towards a more systematic accountability model.

4.5. Strengthening Gender Mainstreaming Through BRRR Processes

The BRRR process provides an important opportunity to institutionalise gender-responsive oversight because it requires committees to assess departmental performance and make recommendations for improvement. To strengthen this process, every committee should routinely consider gender-related questions when reviewing departmental performance.

Committees should ask whether departments collect and use gender-disaggregated data, allocate resources equitably, measure outcomes for women and men, address gender inequalities within their sector and implement previous gender-related recommendations. This would transform gender from an

issue discussed primarily by specialised committees into a standard component of parliamentary accountability. The BRRR analysis demonstrates that Parliament has made meaningful progress in recognising gender equality as a cross-cutting issue. The identification of 94 gender-related recommendations between 2019 and 2025 shows that gender considerations increasingly feature within parliamentary oversight.

However, the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming depends on whether these recommendations produce measurable changes. Parliament's challenge is therefore not only to identify gender inequalities but to ensure that government institutions address them. A gender-responsive Parliament is one where committees do not merely acknowledge gender inequality but actively monitor whether public policies, budgets and programs reduce it. The transition from recognition to accountability requires Parliament to move from asking "has government considered gender?" towards asking "has government changed outcomes for women?".

This shift is central to transforming gender mainstreaming from a policy commitment into a practical mechanism for democratic accountability.

5. Gender-Responsive Budgeting and Financial Oversight: Ensuring Public Resources Advance Gender Equality

Government budgets are among the most powerful instruments through which governments determine their priorities and translate policy commitments into practical outcomes. While budgets are often presented as technically neutral documents concerned primarily with revenue, expenditure and fiscal management, feminist economists and gender scholars have long argued that public spending decisions are not gender-neutral. The allocation of resources reflects political choices about whose needs are prioritised, whose experiences are recognised and which social challenges receive institutional attention. Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) emerged from this understanding. It does not mean creating separate budgets for women or allocating funds exclusively to women's programs. Rather, it involves analysing how public revenue, expenditure and financial decisions affect women and men differently, and using this information to ensure that government resources contribute towards reducing inequality.

For Parliament, GRB is a critical component of oversight because legislative accountability is not only about determining whether government has spent money legally or whether departments have met financial targets. It is also about assessing whether public resources are producing equitable outcomes and whether government spending is addressing constitutional commitments to equality.

A budget that is technically compliant but fails to address persistent inequalities may still reproduce disadvantage. GRB therefore shifts the focus of parliamentary oversight from “how much was spent?” towards the broader question of “who benefited, who was excluded and did spending contribute to equality?”.

The theoretical foundation of GRB is rooted in feminist political economy, which challenges the assumption that economic and fiscal policies are gender-neutral. Traditional approaches to public finance often treat citizens as equally positioned recipients of government policy. Feminist economists argue that this assumption overlooks the different social and economic realities that shape women’s and men’s lives. Because women and men frequently occupy different social roles, participate differently in labour markets and experience unequal access to resources, public expenditure can have unequal effects even when policies appear neutral.

Diane Elson’s influential work on GRB argues that budgets are not simply technical financial documents but reflections of societal priorities and values. According to Elson, gender budgeting provides a mechanism for examining whether government expenditure patterns reinforce or reduce inequality. A budget therefore represents not only economic choices but also social choices.

The work of scholars such as Debbie Budlender and Guy Hewitt (Budlender and Hewitt, 2003) has demonstrated that GRB is not about creating parallel budgets for women but about integrating gender analysis into existing budget processes.

Their approach emphasises three key questions:

- I. Who benefits from public expenditure?*
- II. Who may be excluded or disadvantaged by current spending patterns?*
- III. What adjustments are necessary to ensure more equitable outcomes?*

Applied to parliamentary oversight, this means committees should examine whether departmental budgets respond to the realities of women and men within their sectors. For example, a transport budget cannot be assessed only by kilometers of roads built or numbers of buses purchased. A gender-responsive assessment would ask whether transport systems improve women's safety, whether routes respond to women's commuting patterns and whether infrastructure enables women's economic participation.

5.1. International Context: The Global Evolution of Gender-Responsive Budgeting

5.1.1. Austria: A Constitutional Commitment to Gender Budgeting

Austria provides one of the strongest examples of institutionalised GRB. In 2009, Austria incorporated gender budgeting into its Federal Constitution, requiring all levels of government to consider gender equality in budget processes. The Austrian model requires government institutions to identify gender equality objectives, develop indicators and assess whether public expenditure contributes towards achieving those objectives.

The significance of the Austrian example is that gender budgeting became part of the normal budget cycle rather than a voluntary exercise. Gender equality became a requirement of financial governance. For parliamentary oversight, this provides an important lesson: GRB is most effective when it is embedded within institutional systems, supported by measurable indicators and linked to accountability mechanisms.

5.1.2. Canada: Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+)

Canada has developed another internationally recognised approach through its Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) framework. The system requires policymakers to examine how different groups may experience policies differently based not only on gender but also factors such as race, disability, age, geography and socioeconomic status. The Canadian approach demonstrates the importance of recognising that women are not a single category. Gender intersects with other forms of inequality, meaning that policies may affect rural women, women with disabilities, migrant women and economically disadvantaged women differently.

Gender Mainstreaming in Parliament

Case study: Canada's Gender-Based Analysis Plus Framework



Applying Intersectionality to Government Decision-Making

Canada's GBA+ framework demonstrates how governments can systematically assess the different impacts policies may have on diverse groups. The framework recognises that gender intersects with race, disability, age, geography and economic status.



www.parlimeter.org.za

Figure 3 Case study: Canada's Gender-Based Analysis Plus Framework

This intersectional approach is particularly relevant to South Africa, where gender inequality is shaped by historical apartheid inequalities, racial inequality, poverty and geographic disparities.

5.2. South African Context: Progress and Challenges in Gender-Responsive Budgeting

South Africa has a long history of engagement with GRB. Following the transition to democracy, Parliament and civil society organisations (CSO) played an important role in developing approaches to gender budget analysis. The Women's Budget Initiative, established in 1995 by a coalition of parliamentarians, researchers and CSOs, was one of the earliest gender budgeting initiatives globally. It examined government budgets through a gender lens and sought to demonstrate how expenditure decisions affected women and men differently.

Gender Mainstreaming in Parliament



Case study: South Africa's Women's Budget Initiative

South Africa's Early Gender Budgeting Leadership

South Africa's Women's Budget Initiative, established in 1995, was one of the earliest gender budgeting initiatives internationally. The initiative demonstrated that budgets are not neutral instruments but reflect political priorities. Through analysing government expenditure from a gender perspective, the initiative showed how resource allocation influences women's access to services, economic opportunities and public support.



www.parlimeter.org.za

Figure 4 Case study: South Africa's Women's Budget Initiative

The initiative was significant because it demonstrated that gender budgeting could be used as a parliamentary accountability tool. It moved discussions about gender equality beyond policy commitments and into questions of resource allocation. Over time, elements of GRB became incorporated into South Africa's broader planning and monitoring frameworks. The government introduced gender-responsive planning approaches and developed mechanisms requiring departments to consider gender equality within their programs.

However, despite these commitments, implementation remains uneven. Using ParliMeter one can see that gender budget analysis remains underdeveloped as a consistent parliamentary practice. While gender-related expenditure issues are considered within some committee processes, gender analysis is often concentrated within specialised gender structures rather than systematically applied across all parliamentary committees.

This creates a significant limitation because most government spending does not occur through departments specifically responsible for women's issues. The budgets of departments responsible for finance, infrastructure, transport, health, education, policing, agriculture and economic development have major implications for gender equality.

Parliament's role in GRB is not simply to review whether departments have spent allocated funds. Its role is to determine whether public resources are advancing constitutional commitments to equality. ParliMeter data indicates that while Parliament has increasingly raised gender-related concerns through committee processes, a more systematic approach is required. Every parliamentary committee should incorporate gender analysis into budget oversight. This requires moving away from the assumption that gender is relevant only to the Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities.

For GRB to become embedded within Parliament, several reforms are necessary, these include:

- First, Parliament should require all committees to incorporate gender analysis into BRRRs. Gender should not be addressed only where departments have explicit gender mandates; it should be considered across all sectors.
- Second, departments should be required to provide gender-disaggregated data as part of their budget submissions. Without reliable data showing who benefits from public spending, Parliament cannot effectively evaluate equality outcomes.
- Third, parliamentary oversight should move from tracking commitments to tracking results. Committees should monitor whether gender-related recommendations lead to policy changes, improved service delivery and measurable outcomes.
- Fourth, Parliament should strengthen collaboration with institutions such as the CGE, CSOs and research bodies to improve access to gender analysis and evidence.
- Finally, GRB should be understood not as an additional administrative requirement but as a mechanism for improving democratic accountability.



Five reforms to strengthen gender-responsive budgeting



A summative overview for parliamentary oversight

1

1. Integrate gender analysis into all BRRRs

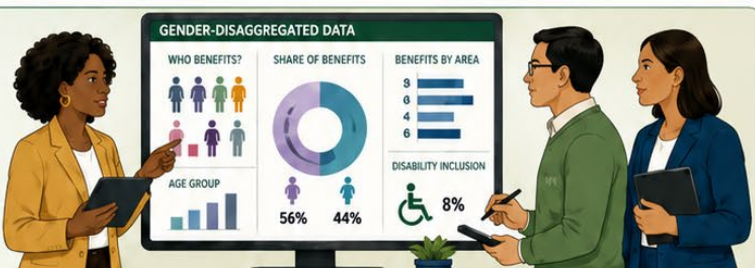
All committees should consider gender impacts in Budgetary Review and Recommendation Reports, not only departments with explicit gender mandates.



2

2. Require gender-disaggregated data

Departments should provide budget data showing who benefits from public spending so equality outcomes can be assessed.



3

3. Track results, not only commitments

Oversight should monitor whether recommendations lead to policy change, better service delivery, and measurable outcomes.



4

4. Strengthen collaboration and evidence

Parliament should work more closely with the CGE, civil society organisations, and research bodies to strengthen gender analysis.



5

5. Understand GRB as accountability

Gender-responsive budgeting is not an extra administrative task: it is a tool for stronger democratic accountability.



GRB = Gender-Responsive Budgeting

Figure 5 Reform priorities to strengthen GRB

GRB represents a fundamental shift in how governments and legislatures understand public finance. It recognises that budgets are not merely financial documents but expressions of political priorities and social values. South Africa has made important progress in recognising the importance of gender equality within public policy and parliamentary oversight. However, the challenge remains ensuring that gender analysis becomes embedded across all budget processes and committee work. For Parliament, the central question is no longer simply whether government is spending money, but whether public resources are contributing to a more equal society.

6. Priorities of a gender focused democracy

South Africa has established important foundations: women's representation is significant, gender-focused structures exist and parliamentary oversight increasingly recognises gender as a cross-cutting issue. However, the next phase requires institutionalising gender equality within every aspect of parliamentary work. The ultimate measure of gender mainstreaming is therefore not the number of discussions held or reports produced, but whether parliamentary action contributes to reducing inequality and improving the lived experiences of women across South Africa.

The presence of women within Parliament represents a significant democratic achievement. Women's increased participation has contributed to broader representation and has ensured that issues historically marginalised within political decision-making spaces receive greater visibility. The establishment of dedicated structures, such as the Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities and the Multi-Party Women's Caucus, has further strengthened Parliament's ability to focus attention on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Representation asks whether women are present within Parliament. Transformation asks whether their participation contributes to changing institutions, policies and outcomes. A Parliament may achieve significant levels of women's representation while still falling short of gender equality if women do not have equal influence over decision-making processes, if gender analysis is absent from key policy areas or if parliamentary recommendations do not translate into measurable improvements.

A truly gender-responsive Parliament must therefore move beyond measuring participation numbers alone. It must examine whether parliamentary decisions improve women's access to resources, services, safety, economic opportunities and political power. It must ask whether government budgets address

gender inequalities, whether legislation responds to different lived experiences and whether oversight processes effectively hold the Executive accountable for advancing equality. The future of gender mainstreaming in Parliament requires a shift from a model where gender is addressed primarily through specialised structures towards one where gender equality becomes embedded across the entire institution.

The first priority should be the institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming through a comprehensive parliamentary framework. While Parliament has developed important gender-related mechanisms, a stronger framework would ensure consistency across all committees and parliamentary bodies. Gender analysis should become a standard requirement within legislative reviews, oversight programs, budget assessments and committee recommendations. This would represent an important shift in parliamentary practice. Instead of asking whether a matter is specifically a “women’s issue”, committees should routinely ask how every policy area affects women and men differently. This approach recognises that gender equality is relevant not only to portfolios dealing with women’s affairs, but also to finance, infrastructure, policing, education, economic development, agriculture, mining and all other areas of governance.

The second priority should be strengthening accountability mechanisms. BRRRs demonstrate that Parliament increasingly identifies gender-related concerns and makes recommendations to departments. However, the effectiveness of oversight depends on whether these recommendations are followed through and whether they produce measurable outcomes. Future gender mainstreaming efforts should therefore focus on strengthening recommendation tracking systems. Parliament should be able to demonstrate not only what concerns were raised, but whether government responded, whether corrective action occurred and whether conditions improved as a result. This requires moving towards an outcomes-based approach to parliamentary oversight. Success should not be measured only by the number of questions asked, hearings held or recommendations issued. It should also be measured by whether parliamentary action contributes to reducing inequalities.

The third priority should be strengthening GRB. Public resources determine the ability of government to implement commitments to equality. Parliament therefore has an important role in ensuring that budgets are assessed not only for financial compliance but also for their social impact. A stronger gender-responsive budgeting approach would require departments to provide gender-disaggregated data and

demonstrate how expenditure decisions contribute to equality outcomes. Committees should be equipped to assess who benefits from public spending, whether programs reach marginalised women and whether resources are addressing structural barriers.

The fourth priority should be strengthening women's influence within parliamentary structures. While women's representation has improved significantly, gender equality requires attention to where decision-making power is located. Future assessments should therefore examine women's participation in leadership positions, committee chairperson roles, parliamentary management structures and agenda-setting processes. The objective should not only be ensuring women's presence within Parliament, but ensuring that women have equal opportunities to shape parliamentary priorities and outcomes.

The fifth priority should be deepening public participation. A gender-responsive Parliament must ensure that women from diverse backgrounds are able to influence democratic processes. This requires particular attention to groups whose voices may remain marginalised, including rural women, women with disabilities, young women and women experiencing economic disadvantage. Public participation should not only measure the number of submissions received or hearings conducted. It should assess whose voices are being heard, whose experiences are informing parliamentary decisions and whether participation mechanisms are accessible to all citizens.



Five priorities for a more gender-responsive Parliament

A summative overview of key reform priorities



1

1. Institutionalise gender mainstreaming

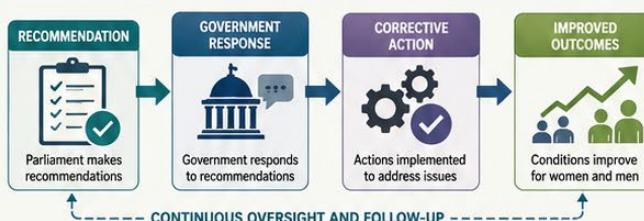
Adopt a comprehensive parliamentary framework so gender analysis becomes standard in legislative reviews, oversight programmes, budget assessments and committee recommendations. Every committee should ask how policy affects women and men differently across all sectors.



2

2. Strengthen accountability

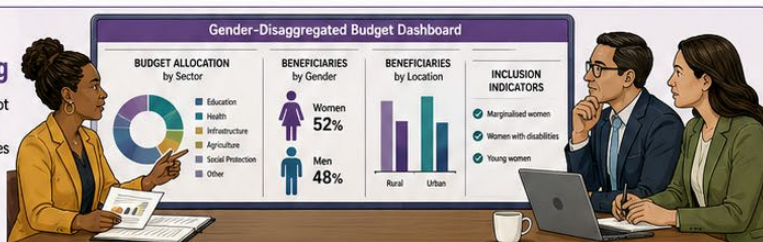
Move beyond identifying concerns to tracking results. Parliament should monitor whether recommendations are acted on, whether government responds, and whether conditions improve. Oversight should measure outcomes, not only activity.



3

3. Strengthen gender-responsive budgeting

Budgets should be assessed for social impact, not only financial compliance. Departments should provide gender-disaggregated data so committees can see who benefits from spending, whether marginalised women are reached, and whether resources reduce structural barriers.



4

4. Strengthen women's influence

Equality is not only about representation but also about power. Assess women's participation in leadership roles, committee chairpersonships, parliamentary management and agenda-setting so women can shape priorities and outcomes equally.



5

5. Deepen public participation

A gender-responsive Parliament must hear diverse voices. Participation should be accessible to rural women, women with disabilities, young women and women facing economic disadvantage. Success depends on whose voices are heard and whether public input shapes decisions.



Gender-responsive oversight links mainstreaming, accountability, budgeting, influence and participation.



Figure 6 Priorities for a Gender-responsive Parliament

7. Recommendations: Strengthening Gender Mainstreaming in Parliament

The next phase of Parliament's gender mainstreaming agenda should focus on moving from visibility to measurable outcomes. First, Parliament should develop a comprehensive gender mainstreaming framework that applies across all committees. This should establish clear expectations regarding gender analysis, reporting requirements and accountability mechanisms. Second, all committees should be required to consider gender implications within their oversight responsibilities. Gender should become part of standard parliamentary practice rather than an issue addressed only by specialised committees. Third, Parliament should strengthen gender-responsive budgeting by requiring departments to provide gender-disaggregated data and demonstrate how expenditure contributes to equality outcomes. Fourth, Parliament should improve the tracking of gender-related recommendations emerging from BRRR processes. Recommendations should have clear responsibilities, timelines, indicators and follow-up mechanisms. Finally, Parliament should continue strengthening women's participation not only through representation but through meaningful influence in leadership, committee decision-making and agenda-setting processes.

The overall assessment is that Parliament has made meaningful progress in advancing gender mainstreaming, but the process remains incomplete. Parliament has succeeded in creating gender equality structures, increasing women's representation, raising gender-related oversight questions and recognising that gender affects all areas of governance. However, gender mainstreaming has not yet become a fully embedded institutional practice. Gender analysis remains uneven across committees, budget processes do not consistently apply gender perspectives and follow-up mechanisms are insufficient to determine whether parliamentary interventions produce improved outcomes.

The central challenge for Parliament is therefore moving beyond representation towards transformation. A gender-responsive Parliament is not simply one where women are present. It is one where gender equality influences how laws are made, how budgets are scrutinised, how government performance is evaluated and how public resources are allocated.

The measure of success is ultimately not whether Parliament discusses gender equality, but whether parliamentary action contributes to reducing inequality and improving the lived realities of women across South Africa.

The assessment of gender mainstreaming within Parliament demonstrates that significant progress has been made in establishing structures, increasing representation and incorporating gender considerations into aspects of parliamentary oversight. However, the analysis of committee work, parliamentary questions and BRRRs demonstrates that gender mainstreaming remains uneven and is not yet consistently embedded across all parliamentary processes.

The central challenge is moving from gender awareness to gender accountability. Parliament has increasingly recognised gender inequality as a governance issue, but the next phase requires stronger institutional mechanisms to ensure that gender considerations influence decision-making, resource allocation and oversight outcomes.

Strengthening gender mainstreaming requires a shift from treating gender as a specialised area of work towards recognising it as a core component of effective democratic governance. The following recommendations seek to strengthen Parliament's ability to monitor, evaluate and advance gender equality through its constitutional responsibilities.

7.1. Establish a Comprehensive Gender Mainstreaming Framework Across Parliament

Parliament should adopt a comprehensive gender mainstreaming framework that applies across all committees, parliamentary bodies and institutional structures. While Parliament has established important gender-focused mechanisms, including the Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities and the Multi-Party Women's Caucus, gender mainstreaming requires that all parliamentary structures take responsibility for integrating gender considerations into their work. A parliamentary gender mainstreaming framework should provide clear guidance on how gender analysis should be incorporated into legislative processes, oversight activities, budget reviews, public participation mechanisms and institutional decision-making.

The framework should define:

- the responsibilities of committees and parliamentary officials in applying gender analysis;
- minimum standards for gender-responsive oversight;
- indicators for measuring progress;
- reporting requirements;
- mechanisms for monitoring implementation.

The need for such a framework reflects international best practice. Countries that have successfully institutionalised gender mainstreaming, including Sweden, Austria and Canada, have moved beyond gender equality commitments towards formal systems that require institutions to assess the gender impacts of policies and expenditure decisions. For Parliament, this would ensure that gender equality is not dependent on the priorities of individual committees or MPs but becomes a consistent feature of parliamentary practice. A formal framework would also address one of the key challenges identified in this report: uneven application of gender analysis across parliamentary structures. While some committees actively engage with gender-related issues, others do not consistently incorporate gender considerations into their oversight work.

7.2. Make Gender Analysis a Standard Requirement Across All Parliamentary Work

Gender analysis should become a routine requirement within all parliamentary processes, including legislation review, budget oversight, departmental performance assessments, annual reports and committee recommendations. The current approach often results in gender being considered primarily within committees with explicit gender-related mandates. A gender-responsive Parliament requires every committee to consider how its sector affects women and men differently. This approach reflects the theoretical foundations of gender mainstreaming: gender inequality is not produced only through explicitly gendered policies but also through seemingly neutral decisions that fail to account for different social realities. Requiring gender analysis across all parliamentary work would therefore shift Parliament from a reactive approach, where gender is considered when problems emerge, towards a proactive approach where gender impacts are assessed before decisions are made.

7.3. Establish a Public Gender Accountability Tracker

Parliament should establish a public gender accountability tracker to strengthen transparency, follow-up and institutional accountability. A gender accountability tracker would address this gap by creating a public mechanism to monitor the full lifecycle of parliamentary recommendations.

The tracker could record:

- the committee responsible;
- the department or institution required to respond;
- the nature of the gender-related concern;
- the recommendation issued;

- implementation deadlines;
- evidence submitted by departments;
- progress status;
- follow-up actions required.

Such a mechanism would strengthen Parliament's oversight role by ensuring that gender-related recommendations do not end with the publication of a report but remain active accountability commitments. Internationally, stronger recommendation tracking systems have become an important feature of effective parliamentary oversight because they allow legislatures and citizens to monitor whether government responds to identified concerns.

7.4. Institutionalise Gender-Responsive Budgeting Within Parliamentary Financial Oversight

Gender-responsive budgeting should become a compulsory component of parliamentary financial oversight processes. Parliament should require departments to provide gender-disaggregated financial information that enables committees to assess:

- who benefits from government expenditure;
- whether resources reach women equitably;
- whether programs address gender inequalities;
- whether spending produces measurable outcomes.

7.5. Strengthen Women's Participation and Influence in Parliamentary Leadership

While South Africa has achieved significant progress in women's representation, gender mainstreaming requires attention not only to women's presence but also to women's influence. The distinction between descriptive representation and substantive representation is central here. A Parliament may achieve relatively high levels of women's participation while still experiencing inequalities in leadership opportunities, agenda-setting influence and access to decision-making structures.

Parliament should therefore strengthen mechanisms to monitor women's participation in influential positions, including:

- committee chairperson roles;
- parliamentary leadership structures;
- oversight positions;

- legislative agenda-setting processes.

The objective should not simply be increasing the number of women in Parliament, but ensuring that women participate equally in shaping parliamentary priorities. This is particularly important because committees are central sites of political influence. Committee chairs and leadership positions influence meeting agendas, oversight priorities, stakeholder engagement and recommendations.

7.6. Strengthen Public Participation to Include Marginalised Women's Voices

A gender-responsive Parliament must ensure that women from diverse backgrounds are able to participate meaningfully in democratic processes. While Parliament has established public participation mechanisms, barriers remain for many women, particularly rural women, women with disabilities, young women and women from economically disadvantaged communities. The principle of inclusive democracy requires recognising that women do not experience inequality in the same way. Gender intersects with race, class, geography, disability and economic status. For example, rural women may face challenges accessing parliamentary processes because of distance, transport costs, limited digital access or lack of information about participation opportunities. Strengthening public participation therefore requires Parliament to move beyond formal opportunities for engagement and consider whether those opportunities are practically accessible. Meaningful participation is essential because parliamentary oversight is strengthened when it reflects the experiences of those most affected by government decisions.

7.7. Strengthen Gender-Disaggregated Data and Evidence-Based Oversight

A recurring challenge identified across gender mainstreaming efforts is the availability of reliable gender-disaggregated data. Effective oversight depends on evidence. Without accurate information showing how policies and programs affect women and men differently, Parliament cannot effectively evaluate whether government interventions are reducing inequalities.

Departments should therefore be required to provide gender-disaggregated information as part of their reporting obligations. This should include data relating to employment and leadership representation, programme beneficiaries, procurement beneficiaries, service access, budget allocations and programme outcomes.



1 Establish a Comprehensive Gender Mainstreaming Framework Across Parliament



Adopt a binding framework that sets clear responsibilities, standards and processes for integrating gender considerations across all parliamentary structures.



2 Make Gender Analysis a Standard Requirement Across All Parliamentary Work



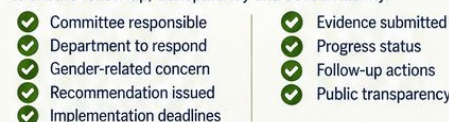
Ensure every policy, law, budget, oversight activity and recommendation considers how it affects women and men differently.



3 Establish a Public Gender Accountability Tracker



Track the full lifecycle of gender-related recommendations to ensure follow-up, transparency and accountability.



4 Institutionalise Gender-Responsive Budgeting Within Parliamentary Financial Oversight



Require gender-disaggregated data and assess how public spending contributes to equality outcomes.



5 Strengthen Women's Participation and Influence in Parliamentary Leadership



Monitor and promote women's representation in positions of influence to ensure equal opportunities to shape parliamentary priorities.



6 Strengthen Public Participation to Include Marginalised Women's Voices



Ensure participation mechanisms are inclusive, accessible and meaningful, so that all women can influence parliamentary decisions.



7 Strengthen Gender-Disaggregated Data and Evidence-Based Oversight



Require departments to provide reliable gender-disaggregated data to support evidence-based oversight and informed decision-making.



A gender-responsive Parliament strengthens democracy, improves oversight and advances equality for women, men, girls and boys.

Figure 7 Recommendations to Strengthen Parliament's Constitutional Role in Gender Equality

8. The way forward: Expanding Understanding of Gender Mainstreaming in Parliament

While this report provides an important overview of gender mainstreaming within Parliament, further research is required to deepen understanding of how gender equality is incorporated into parliamentary practice and whether institutional processes translate into meaningful outcomes. Future research could examine the relationship between women's representation and parliamentary influence by analysing whether increased numbers of women MPs translate into greater participation in agenda-setting, committee leadership and legislative outcomes.

Another important area for future research is the effectiveness of gender-related parliamentary recommendations. While the ParliMeter analysis identifies gender-related recommendations within BRRRs, further work could examine whether departments implement these recommendations and whether implementation produces measurable changes. This would allow Parliament and civil society to move from assessing the quantity of gender-related oversight towards evaluating the quality and impact of that oversight. There is also scope for research examining the experiences of women within Parliament itself. While institutional policies and representation statistics provide important information, understanding the everyday experiences of women MPs, committee members and parliamentary staff would provide deeper insight into institutional culture, barriers to participation and opportunities for reform.

Finally, future research should continue examining the relationship between parliamentary accountability and broader societal outcomes. Gender mainstreaming should ultimately be assessed not only by institutional processes but by whether democratic governance contributes to meaningful improvements in people's lives.

9. Final Reflection

Parliament has made significant progress in establishing the foundations of a gender-responsive democracy. Women are present in substantial numbers, gender equality structures exist and parliamentary oversight increasingly recognises gender-based inequalities. However, the next phase of gender mainstreaming requires a deeper institutional transformation. The challenge is no longer only ensuring that women have a place within democratic institutions; it is ensuring that those institutions

actively dismantle barriers, address inequality and produce outcomes that improve the lives of women across society.

The future of gender mainstreaming lies in ensuring that equality becomes embedded in every parliamentary decision, every budget allocation, every oversight process and every interaction between Parliament and the public.

The journey from representation to transformation remains unfinished, but it provides the foundation for building a Parliament that does not merely reflect South African society, but actively works to make that society more equal, inclusive and democratic.

10. Glossary and Abbreviations

BRRR: Budget Review and Recommendation Report: A parliamentary oversight mechanism through which committees assess departmental performance, financial management and service delivery outcomes, and make recommendations to the National Assembly regarding future budget allocations and departmental improvements.

CGE: Commission for Gender Equality: A Chapter 9 constitutional institution established to promote, protect and monitor gender equality in South Africa.

GBV: Gender-Based Violence: Violence directed against an individual because of their gender or violence that disproportionately affects people of a particular gender. In the South African context, GBV is recognised as a significant human rights and governance challenge.

GRB: Gender-Responsive Budgeting: An approach to public finance that examines how government revenue and expenditure decisions affect women and men differently and seeks to ensure that public resources contribute towards reducing gender inequalities.

GBA+: Gender-Based Analysis Plus: Canada's gender analysis framework that examines how policies and programs affect individuals differently based on gender and intersecting factors such as race, disability, age, geography and socioeconomic status.

IDP: Institutional Development Plan / Indicator Framework: Where used in the international comparison section, refers to institutional indicators used to evaluate progress towards gender-responsive governance.

IPU: Inter-Parliamentary Union: The global organisation of national parliaments that collects and analyses comparative data on parliamentary representation, including women's political participation.

MP: Member of Parliament: An elected representative serving within the National Assembly or appointed as a delegate to the National Council of Provinces.

NA: National Assembly: The primary legislative chamber of the South African Parliament, consisting of elected representatives.

NCOP: National Council of Provinces: The second chamber of Parliament representing provincial interests in national legislative processes.

ParliMeter: A parliamentary monitoring initiative providing data and analysis on parliamentary performance, oversight, representation and accountability.

SOE: State-Owned Enterprise: A government-owned institution established to provide public services, strategic infrastructure or economic functions.

UN: United Nations: The international organisation responsible for developing global norms and frameworks relating to human rights, development and gender equality.

11. References

- Austrian Federal Ministry for Education and Women's Affairs (2016) *Gender Budgeting in Austria*. Vienna: Federal Government of Austria.
- Budlender, D. (2000) *The South African Women's Budget Initiative*. Cape Town: Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA).
- Budlender, D. and Hewitt, G. (2002) *Gender Budgets Make Cents: Understanding Gender Responsive Budgets*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Budlender, D. and Hewitt, G. (2003) *Engendering Budgets: A Practitioners' Guide to Understanding and Implementing Gender-Responsive Budgets*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Budlender, D., Sharp, R. and Allen, K. (1998) *How to Do a Gender-Sensitive Budget Analysis: Contemporary Research and Practice*. Canberra: Australian Agency for International Development.
- Commission for Gender Equality (various years) *Annual Reports and Parliamentary Submissions*. Johannesburg: Commission for Gender Equality.
- Elson, D. (1998) 'Integrating Gender Issues into National Budgetary Policies and Procedures: Some Policy Options', *Journal of International Development*, 10(7), pp.929–941.
- Elson, D. (2002) 'Gender Responsive Budget Initiatives: Some Key Dimensions and Practical Examples', in Budlender, D., Elson, D., Hewitt, G. and Mukhopadhyay, T. (eds.) *Gender Budgets Make Cents: Understanding Gender Responsive Budgets*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat, pp.15–29.
- European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (2016) *Gender Mainstreaming*. Vilnius: European Institute for Gender Equality.
- European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (2020) *Gender Equality Index 2020: Digitalisation and the Future of Work*. Vilnius: European Institute for Gender Equality.
- Government of Canada (2023) *Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) Framework*. Ottawa: Government of Canada.
- Government Offices of Sweden (2016) *The Swedish Gender Equality Policy: A Government Strategy*. Stockholm: Government Offices of Sweden.
- Hassim, S. (2006) *Gender and Social Policy in a Global Context: Uncovering the Gendered Dynamics of South African Policy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2024) *Women in Parliament: 1995–2024*. Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union.
- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2025) *Women in Parliament: Global Data*. Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union.

- Krook, M.L. and Mackay, F. (eds.) (2011) *Gender, Politics and Institutions: Towards a Feminist Institutionalism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mackay, F. (2014) 'Nested Newness, Institutional Innovation, and the Gendered Limits of Change', *Politics & Gender*, 10(4), pp.549–571.
- Meer, S. and Sever, C. (2004) *Gender and Citizenship: The South African Experience*. Johannesburg: Commission for Gender Equality.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2015) *Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Public Life*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2023) *Gender Equality in Public Governance*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (various years) *Budget Review and Recommendation Reports (BRRRs)*. Cape Town: Parliament of the Republic of South Africa.
- Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (various years) *Portfolio Committee Reports*. Cape Town: Parliament of the Republic of South Africa.
- Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (2024) *Multi-Party Women's Caucus Reports and Activities*. Cape Town: Parliament of the Republic of South Africa.
- Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (2025) *Annual Reports and Committee Oversight Records*. Cape Town: Parliament of the Republic of South Africa.
- Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG) (2025) *Committee Reports and Parliamentary Oversight Records*. Available at: <https://pmg.org.za>
- ParliMeter (2026) *Analysis of Gender-Related Parliamentary Questions and Ministerial Oversight*. Cape Town: ParliMeter.
- ParliMeter (2026) *Women's Day Statistics Review: Female Representation in the South African Parliament*. Cape Town: ParliMeter.
- Phillips, A. (1995) *The Politics of Presence*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Pitkin, H.F. (1967) *The Concept of Representation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Republic of South Africa (1996) *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Republic of South Africa (1996) *Commission on Gender Equality Act 39 of 1996*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Republic of South Africa (1998) *Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

- Republic of South Africa (2000) *Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Republic of South Africa (2020) *National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide 2020–2030*. Pretoria: Government of South Africa.
- Republic of South Africa (2020) *National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide: Government Response Framework*. Pretoria: Government of South Africa.
- Republic of South Africa (2021) *National Development Plan 2030: Our Future – Make it Work*. Pretoria: National Planning Commission.
- Sharp, R. (2003) *Budgeting for Equity: Gender Budget Initiatives within a Framework of Performance Oriented Budgeting*. New York: United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).
- Swedish Gender Equality Agency (2023) *Gender Mainstreaming in Public Authorities*. Stockholm: Swedish Gender Equality Agency.
- United Nations (1995) *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. Beijing: United Nations.
- United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (1997) *Report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997*. New York: United Nations.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2021) *Gender Equality Strategy 2022–2025*. New York: UNDP.
- United Nations Women (UN Women) (2015) *Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights: Progress of the World's Women 2015–2016*. New York: UN Women.
- United Nations Women (UN Women) (2020) *Gender Equality: Women's Rights in Review 25 Years After Beijing*. New York: UN Women.
- Walby, S. (2005) 'Gender Mainstreaming: Productive Tensions in Theory and Practice', *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 12(3), pp.321–343.
- World Economic Forum (2024) *Global Gender Gap Report 2024*. Geneva: World Economic Forum.
- Young, I.M. (2000) *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.