

## A quick guide to gender-sensitive scrutiny in Zambia

This guide is designed to help Members and staff of the National Assembly of Zambia to integrate gender into their oversight and law-making work.

### Gender equality in Zambia: key statistics

In the [Global Gender Gap Report 2024](#), Zambia ranked 92<sup>nd</sup> out of 146 countries in the world for gender equality, a decline of 47 places since 2020. Inequalities include:

#### Labour market and employment

- The **labour force participation rate (aged 15+)** for males is 47% and 31% for females. The rate for females in rural areas was 20%, and 34% for men. This is compared to 43% for females in urban areas, and 62% of males.
- Only 24% of all employment is in the formal sector - 80% of females and 72% of males were **employed in the informal sector**.
- Only 27% of **businesses** are owned by women, and 5 of out 36 **state-owned enterprises** are run by women.
- It is estimated that women and girls in sub-Saharan Africa spend much as 3 to 3.4 times more than men on **unpaid work** (including caring, cooking, cleaning etc.)

#### Education

- Official statistics state that the **primary school enrolment rate** is 113% for boys and 120% for girls. For **secondary school** this drops to 58% for boys and 63% for girls.
- **Adult literacy** is 84% among females and 91% among males.
- Women make up 50% of **secondary school teachers** and 59% of **primary school teachers**.

#### Health

- **Life expectancy** is 58.7 years for males and 63.1 years for females.
- The **primary causes of death** for females are HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, but for males they are HIV/AIDS, COVID-19, and lower respiratory infections.
- **Prevalence of HIV** among adults ages 15 to 59 years is 15% for females and 9% for males.
- **116 out of every 1,000 girls aged 15-19 gave birth**, which is higher than the regional average (93.4) and for lower middle income countries (42).
- **85 women die per 100,000 live births** due to pregnancy-related causes, which is lower than the regional average.

#### Socio-cultural

- 41% of women have experienced **intimate partner violence** – much higher than the world average of 27%. Survey findings show that Zambians see GBV as the most important women's-rights issue that the government and society should address.
- More than a quarter of girls are **married before the age of 18** – 5% are married before 15.

#### Political representation

- 15% of **MPs** in the National Assembly of Zambia are women, and 16% of Cabinet Ministers.
- Women's representation **in local government** is just 7%.

**Sources:** [Labor Force Survey 2023](#); [2022 Living Conditions Monitoring Survey Report](#); [World Bank Gender Data portal](#); [Gender Division statement April 2025](#); [Ministry of Education – Education Statistics Bulletin 2024](#); [Girls Not Brides](#); [Afrobarometer Dispatch 685](#); [World Health Organisation – Zambia](#); [Progress report on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#); [IPU Parline](#); [IPU Women in Politics 2025](#); [UN Women – local government country profile](#)

## An introduction to gender-sensitive scrutiny

Gender-sensitive scrutiny is a way of exploring and addressing the potential and actual impact of laws, policies, programmes, and budgets on men and women to ensure they are effective and fair.

When making laws, conducting oversight of government actions and approving budgets, MPs and committees have a key role in making sure that:

- decisions do not discriminate against or exclude women or men, either directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally,
- every opportunity to increase gender equality is taken, and
- the actual impact on men and women is monitored.

**The aim of gender-sensitive scrutiny is to increase equality and effectiveness** by making decisions that address different needs, and correct inequalities and inefficiency.

If gender-sensitive scrutiny uncovers unfairness, discrimination or ineffectiveness, MPs can do a number of things, including: make recommendations for change, propose amendments to policies, legislation, or budgets, or publicise their findings to apply political pressure for change.

## Why is gender-sensitive scrutiny important?

**Laws, policies, programmes, and budgets affect men and women in different ways** because of their different needs and experiences. Laws and policies that consider these differences are more likely to be effective.

Gender-sensitive laws, policies, and budgets can improve public satisfaction and cost-effectiveness, saving resources and making sure services are suitable for users. Other benefits include increased transparency and accountability, better decision-making, and improved organisational culture.

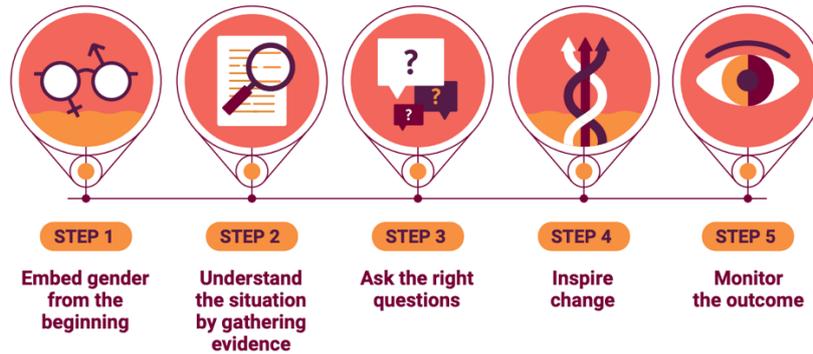
**If different needs and experiences are not explored, there is an assumption that decisions will affect everyone in the same way.** Decisions that do not consider gender risk negatively affecting people's lives, providing ineffective solutions to problems, unfairly or inefficiently allocating public funds, or deepening existing inequalities.

## Who is responsible for gender-sensitive scrutiny?

**All parliamentarians, committees, and officials** should take responsibility for carrying out gender-sensitive scrutiny.

It can be used when examining draft laws, reviewing existing laws, undertaking oversight of government actions, or approving budgets in all policy areas.

## A five-step framework for gender-sensitive scrutiny



This framework can help MPs, officials, and committees integrate gender considerations into their work. It is adapted from the INTER PARES gender-sensitive scrutiny model.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Embed gender from the beginning

This means including gender within the scope of the inquiry from the start, in **terms of reference, calls for evidence, or press releases.**

It might also involve **requesting evidence** from organisations and people that specialise in gender issues, and actively seeking out the views of men and women.



**Example:** A committee begins an inquiry into the impact of automation on the labour market and decides to include gender into the scope. Its terms of reference include “How will automation affect employment opportunities, job displacement, and retraining for women and men in different sectors?”

It invites submissions from gender experts, civil society organisations, and women-led businesses.

### 2. Understand the current situation by gathering evidence

This step involves finding out:

- **Who is/will be/has been affected** by the issue? Is this information available **disaggregated by sex/gender**?
- Is there evidence to show that women and men will be **affected in different ways**? Is it likely that men or women will **benefit more** from the law, policy, programme or budget, or will they benefit equally?
- Will women and men be differently affected because of their **age, ethnic origin, disability, religion, socio-economic status, or geographic location**?
- Are there **existing inequalities** between men and women in this area?
- What are the **gaps in data**?



**Example:** The Committee collects statistics on the proportion of men and women who have lost jobs in sectors vulnerable to automation, and how many are accessing reskilling programs. It holds public hearings with women working in sectors most affected by automation, experts in labour market trends, and representatives from women-led businesses.

<sup>1</sup> INTER PARES (2022) [Gender-sensitive scrutiny: A guide to more effective lawmaking and oversight](#)

The Committee is presented with official labour market data, which shows that 70% of administrative jobs—roles disproportionately held by women—are at high risk of automation, compared to 40% of manufacturing jobs, which are more male-dominated. Women are therefore more likely to experience job losses in automation-prone sectors.

The data reveals that only 35% of participants in government-funded reskilling programs for AI, data science, and robotics are women. The committee hears that as automation shifts job demands, the availability of flexible or part-time work is shrinking. This disproportionately affects women, who still undertake most unpaid caregiving responsibilities.

The evidence also highlights that jobs most at risk of automation tend to have lower wages, and because women are overrepresented in these roles, automation risks widening the gender pay gap.

### 3. Ask the right questions

It is important that **gender-sensitive questions** are asked of stakeholders, experts, Ministers and government officials.

It is also important to find out if, and to what extent, **gender has been considered during the decision-making process**. This means finding out if gender analyses/ gender impact assessments have been carried out, and who was consulted.

Some suggested questions are:

- How is this law or policy **likely to affect men and women** in different ways?
- Does the law/policy **need to be adapted** to account for differences between men and women?
- Is it likely to **increase or decrease existing inequalities** between men and women?
- Is there **disaggregated data** available about the people likely to be affected by this law/policy? If not, how will this be addressed?
- How was gender considered during the **decision-making process**?
- Who was **consulted** in the design of the law/policy?
- How will the **impact on women and men be monitored**?
- Does it adhere to **international law and standards**?



**Example:** The Committee asks the Government: What measures are in place to prevent automation from exacerbating gender inequalities in the labour market? How are retraining and reskilling programs being designed to ensure equal access for men and women?

### 4. Inspire change

If the scrutiny finds that a law, policy, or budget...

- will not benefit women and men fairly, or
- will not contribute to reducing existing inequalities between women and men, or
- directly or indirectly discriminates against women or men, whether intentionally or unintentionally,

Committees can:

- Publish a **report** of the findings, highlighting areas of concern,
- Make **recommendations** for changes to law, budgets, policies, or programmes,
- Propose **amendments** to bills or existing laws, or propose a **new law**,
- Propose **motions or resolutions** in parliament,
- Schedule a **debate or make a speech** in parliament.



**Example:** The Committee produces a report summarising its findings and recommends that the Government:

- Introduces targeted support for women in industries most vulnerable to automation.
- Provide flexible reskilling programs that accommodate caregiving responsibilities.
- Develop new policies to promote women’s participation in science, maths and technology-driven fields.

## 5. Monitor the outcome

Scrutinising the implementation of laws, policies and budgets is not a one-off event, but an ongoing process through the parliamentary legislative and budgetary cycle.

**Post-legislative scrutiny, follow-ups to recommendations made during oversight inquiries and in-year financial scrutiny** are all important tools to check if promises of gender equality are being delivered.

This involves considering:

- What has been the **actual impact** of the law or policy on women and men: did it increase equality, did it change behaviour or choices, provide extra rights or responsibilities, increase or decrease access to resources, power or representation?
- Were there any **unintended or unexpected effects** on men or women?
- What does the **monitoring data** show in terms of women and men, and are there any **gaps in knowledge** about how it is working in practice?
- Were **financial resources** equitably distributed between women and men?



**Example:** The Committees asks the government and industry bodies to submit annual reports on workforce automation’s impact by gender, tracking job displacement rates, training participation, and gender pay gap trends.

## National and international commitments to gender equality

By using gender to help make decisions, parliamentarians are helping to fulfil various national and international obligations that Zambia is party to, and international parliamentary good practice.

### Constitution

The [Zambian Constitution](#) states: “WE, THE PEOPLE OF ZAMBIA: [...] Confirm the equal worth of women and men and their right to freely participate in, determine and build a sustainable



political, legal, economic and social order”. Article 8 section (d) states “The national values and principles are...human dignity, equity, social justice, equality and non-discrimination.”

### Zambia Vision 2030

[Zambia’s Vision 2030](#) aims that “[b]y 2030, Zambians, aspire to live in a strong and dynamic middle-income industrial nation that provides opportunities for improving the well being of all, embodying values of socioeconomic justice, underpinned by the principles of: (i) gender responsive sustainable development; (ii) democracy; (iii) respect for human rights; (iv) good traditional and family values; (v) positive attitude towards work; (vi) peaceful coexistence and; (vii) private-public partnerships.”

### National Gender Policy 2023

[The National Gender Policy](#) aims to “strengthen the coordination of an integrated and multi-sectoral approach in the implementation of gender programmes across all sectors”.

Its policy objectives are to: 1. Eliminate all forms of Gender Based Violence (GBV); 2. Increase equitable access, participation and control in the economic sector; 3. Reduce poverty among vulnerable groups, especially women and girls; 4. Increase women’s participation in employment; 5. Increase participation of women in governance and decision-making; 6. Increase participation of women in science and technology, transport and infrastructure development; 7. Reduce gender disparities in access to education; 8. Facilitate access to cost effective quality and gender responsive health care services for all; 9. Increase access to clean and safe water, sanitation and hygiene services for women and girls; 10. Improve gender responsiveness in disability, HIV/AIDS and climate change; and 11. Strengthen advocacy, coordination, monitoring and evaluation of gender programmes.

### Southern African Development Community (SADC)

Article 12 of the SADC [Protocol on Gender and Development](#) requires that State Parties shall:

- endeavour to **ensure equal and effective representation of women in decision-making positions in the political**, public and private sectors including through the use of special measures as provided for in Article 5. 2.
- ensure that all legislative and other measures are accompanied by **public awareness campaigns which demonstrate the vital link between the equal representation and participation of women and men in decision making** positions, democracy, good governance and citizen participation.”.

### Sustainable Development Goals

Parliaments have a key role in ensuring full implementation of **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5** (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), through law-making, budgeting, oversight, and representation.

### UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

The CEDAW was ratified by Zambia in 1985. Article 2 mandates that governments declare intent to:

- enshrine gender equality into their domestic legislation,
- repeal all discriminatory provisions in their laws, and
- enact new provisions to guard against discrimination against women.

The UN CEDAW Committee’s [concluding observations](#) on Zambia from 2011 say:

- stressed the **crucial role of the legislative power** in ensuring the full implementation of the Convention, and
- **invited National Assembly of Zambia to take the necessary steps regarding the implementation of the present concluding observations** between now and the next reporting period under the Convention.
- **Cited concerns about “about the low rate of participation by women in the political and decision-making processes in Zambia.** The Committee is concerned about the lack of quota systems and about the gender-biased views, negative practices and poor socio-economic status that prevent women from fully accessing the right to participate in public life, particularly at the level of decision-making.”

### Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments

The Inter-Parliamentary Union’s (IPU) [Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments](#) recommends that parliaments:

- **mainstream gender** throughout all its work, and
- **review all government policy and legislation** for their gender impact and compliance with international obligations.

### Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

In the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995](#) governments (including Zambia) committed to carry out “[**mainstream**] a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of their effects on women and men”.

Parliaments have a key role in checking whether these commitments are being realised in practice. [Zambia’s 2024 review of implementation](#) of the Platform for Action sets out achievements and future priorities. It states that:

“[The] **Gender Division** is [...] tasked with promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment as well as coordinating gender mainstreaming across all line ministries and beyond. [...] The State Party has appointed **Gender Focal Points (GFP) in line Ministries** who are responsible for ensuring that gender issues are addressed within their respective sectors.

The State Party reports that a structure under the Office of the President, the **Gender Division, is responsible for coordinating all stakeholders working on gender issues including the implementation of the National Gender Policy**, the BPfA and the 2030 Agenda. The Gender Division coordinates gender equity and equality activities at national and sub-national levels including coordinating with Traditional leaders and community based organizations. [...]

**Ministries, Provinces, Spending Agencies (MPSAs) are required to incorporate gender considerations in their budget proposals.** This involves identifying specific programmes aimed at reducing gender disparities and enhancing women's empowerment. [...]

**The next steps to accelerate the implementation of the BPfA** include strengthening data collection to track progress effectively, increase budgetary allocations for programmes that support gender equality, expand economic opportunities for women through skills training and access to finance. Further, **the State Party will focus on promoting women's participation in politics and continue challenging harmful social norms through education and community engagement.**”