



Dispatch No. 723 | 31 October 2023

## More needs to be done for women's rights, Emaswati say

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**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 723 | Mbuso Dlamini**

### Summary

"The unfinished business of our time" is what the United Nations (2020) calls gender inequality. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 describes equality for women as a human right and a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world.

In Eswatini, gender equality is a work in progress. Major steps forward include the 2018 High Court ruling that the common-law doctrine of marital power – designating the husband as the ruler of the household – is unconstitutional, as well as amendments to the 1964 Marriage Act prohibiting child marriage, the 2018 Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act, and the 2018 Election of Women Act, aimed at increasing women's representation in Parliament (Human Rights Watch, 2023; Shabangu, 2019).

Yet for now, women remain under-represented in leadership positions, holding just 17% of seats in the House of Assembly (IPU Parline, 2023). Girls and women also continue to face violence and discrimination embedded in persistent patriarchal norms (Mwanenguren, 2021). A 2007 Violence Against Children Survey found that almost half (48%) of girls and women aged 13-24 reported having suffered sexual violence (Reza et al., 2009), and in 2018, 17.7% of women aged 15-49 said a current or former intimate partner had subjected them to physical and/or sexual violence during the previous year (UN Women, 2021).

UN Women (2021) also notes that large data gaps hinder monitoring of progress toward the SDGs from a gender perspective.

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 questionnaire to explore Africans' experiences and perceptions of gender equality in control over assets, hiring, land ownership, and political leadership.

In Eswatini, findings show gender gaps in educational attainment and asset ownership. Large majorities express support for gender equality in hiring, land ownership, and political leadership, but almost half also consider it likely that a woman will suffer criticism, harassment, or family problems if she runs for elective office.

Overall, Emaswati say the government should do more to promote equal rights and opportunities for women, ranking gender-based violence and women's under-representation in positions of power as the most important women's-rights issues that their government and society must address.

### Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Nine survey rounds in up to 42 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Eswatini, led by QA Strategic Information, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 adult Emaswati in October-November 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Eswatini in 2013, 2015, 2018, and 2021.

## Key findings

- In Eswatini, women are somewhat less likely than men to have post-secondary education (22% vs. 30%).
- Modest gender gaps persist in ownership of key assets, including a bank account (68% of women vs. 73% of men), a computer (26% vs. 30%), and a motor vehicle (16% vs. 24%).
- Women are slightly less likely than men (50% vs. 55%) to say they make decisions themselves about how household money is spent.
- Large majorities support gender equality in hiring (75%) and land ownership and inheritance (84%).
- Most citizens (86%) say women should have the same chance as men to be elected to political office.
  - However, almost half consider it likely that a woman running for public office will be criticised or harassed (45%) and will face problems with her family (45%).
- Only about one-third (35%) of Emaswati say their government is doing a good job of promoting gender equality.
  - Eight in 10 citizens (80%) say the government needs to do more to promote equal rights and opportunities for women.

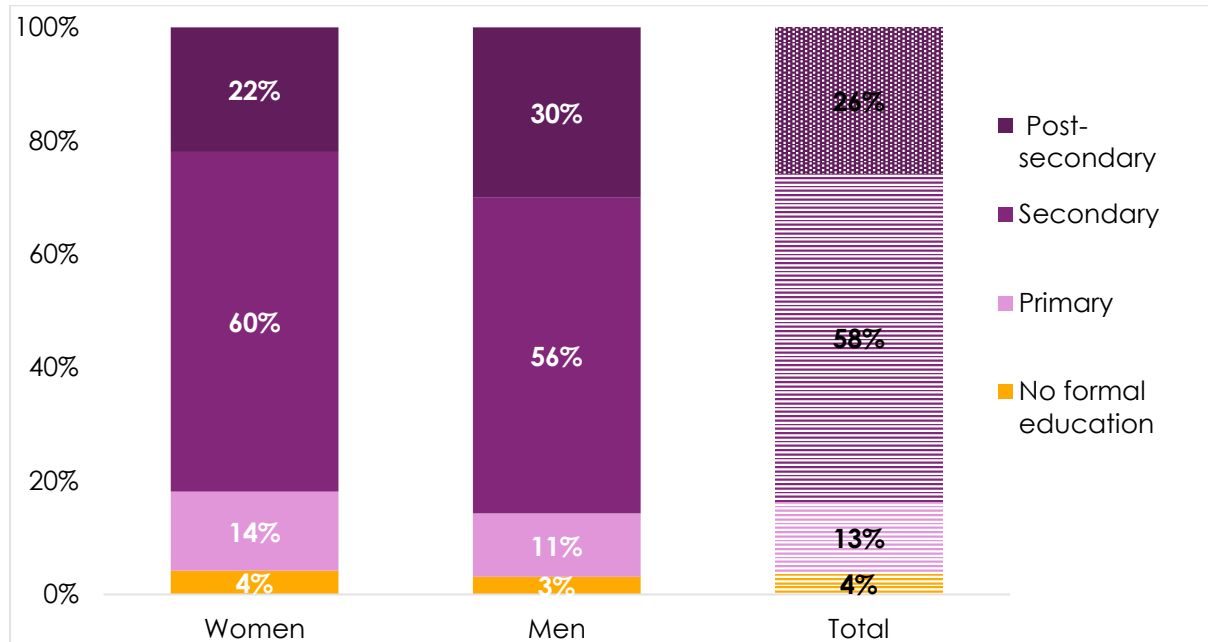
## Education and control of assets

In Eswatini, women are somewhat less likely than men to have post-secondary education (22% vs. 30%) (Figure 1). Instead, slightly more women than men completed their schooling at the secondary (60% vs. 56%) or primary (14% vs. 11%) levels.

A look at asset ownership reveals modest gender gaps: Somewhat fewer women than men report personally owning a bank account (68% vs. 73%), a radio (57% vs. 65%), a computer (26% vs. 30%), and a motor vehicle (16% vs. 24%) (Figure 2). Mobile-phone ownership is high among both genders, at 95%, and women are slightly more likely to say they own a television (65% vs. 60% of men).

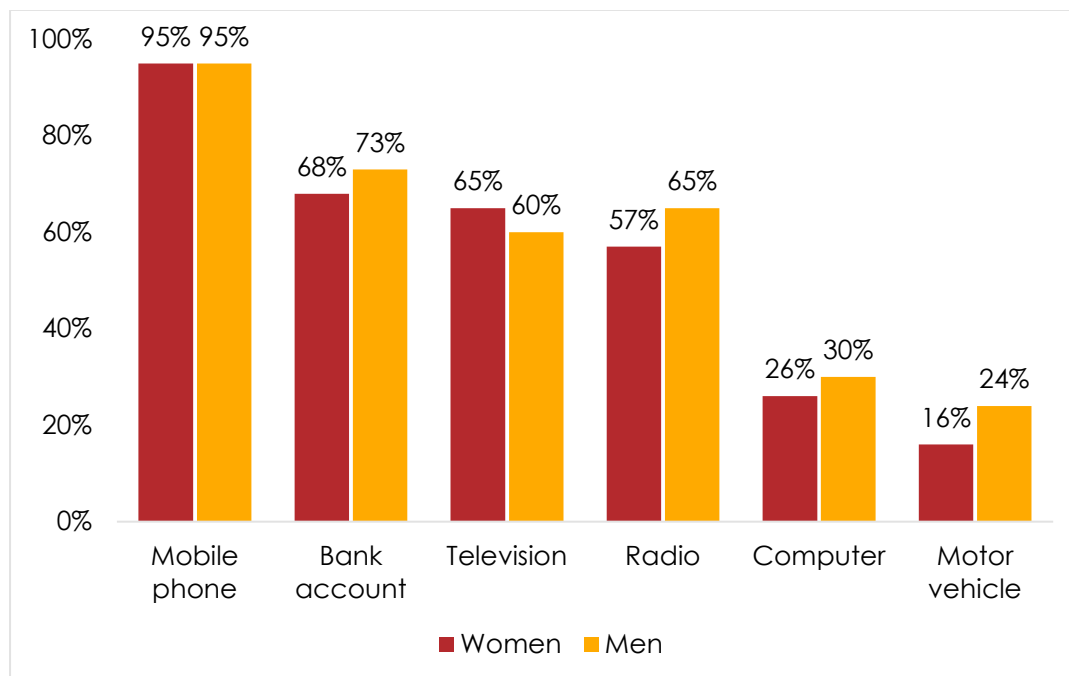
Turning to decisions about how money is used in the household, slightly more men (55%) than women (50%) report making these decisions themselves (Figure 3). About two in 10 respondents (18% of women, 17% of men) say they make financial decisions jointly with their spouse. About one in 10 women and men say their spouse or other family members make the decisions without their input.

**Figure 1: Educational attainment** | by gender | Eswatini | 2022



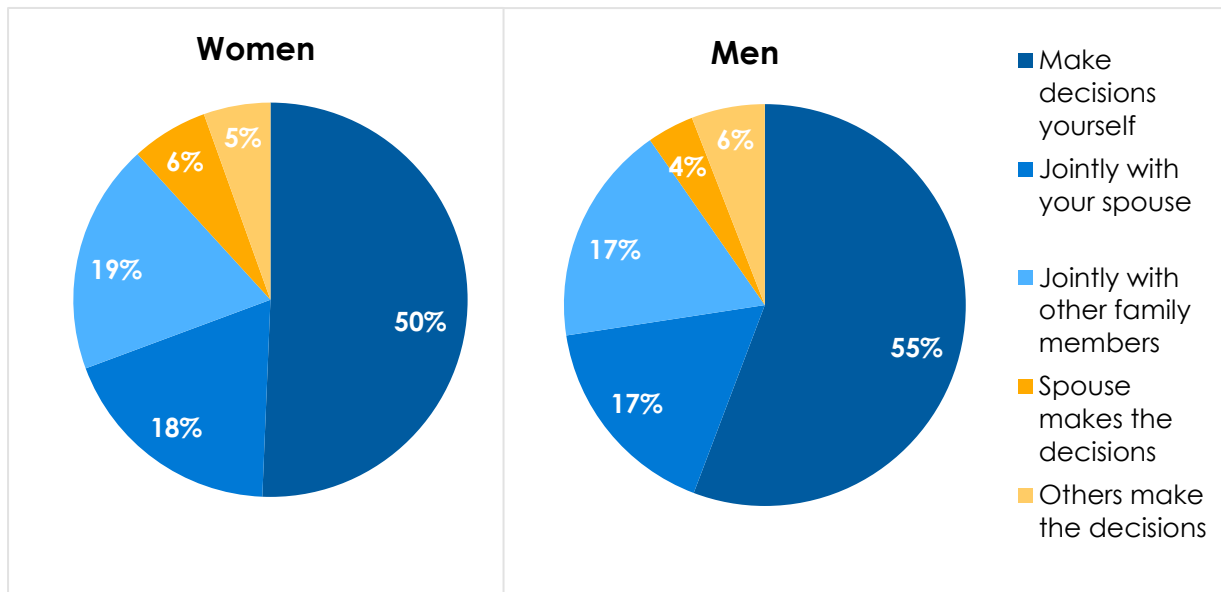
**Respondents were asked:** What is your highest level of education?

**Figure 2: Asset ownership** | by gender | Eswatini | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** Which of these things do you personally own?

**Figure 3: Who decides how money is used? | by gender | Eswatini | 2022**



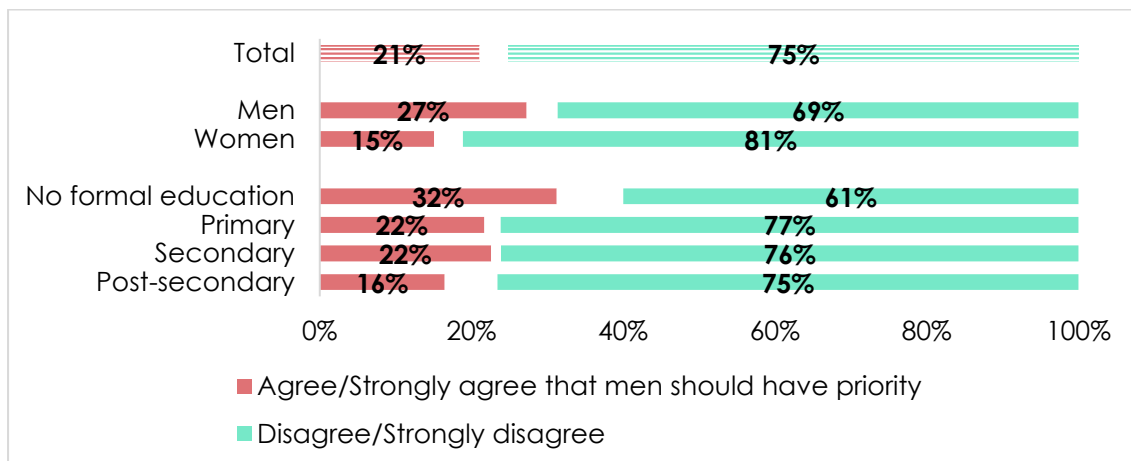
**Respondents were asked:** What is the main way that decisions are made about how to use any money that you have or earn, for example from a job, a business, selling things, or other activities?

### Rights to a job and land

The ability to claim certain rights can be a tool to promote gender equality – or to maintain inequality. Do Emaswati want gender equality when it comes to jobs and land? And if so, how close to equality are they?

Three-quarters (75%) of Emaswati “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with the idea that men should be given priority over women in hiring when jobs are scarce, while only 21% endorse this form of gender discrimination (Figure 4). Support for gender equality in hiring is weaker among men (69%) than women (81%). Only 61% of respondents with no formal schooling think women and men should have the same chance of getting a job, compared to 75%-77% of their more educated counterparts.

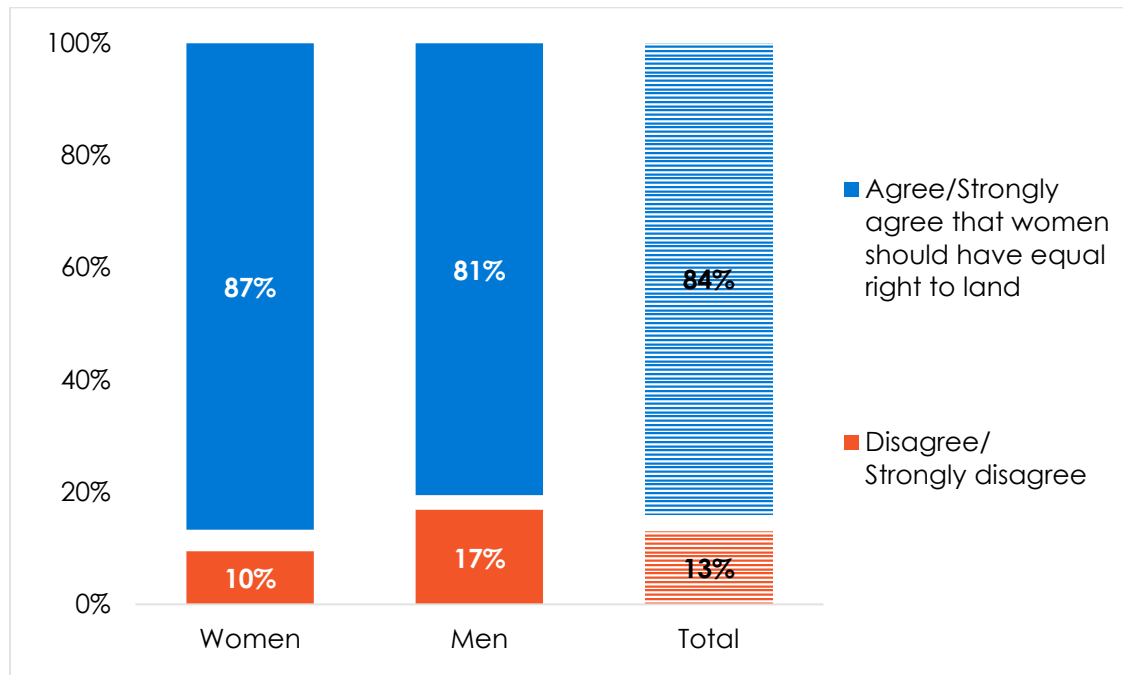
**Figure 4: Should men have priority for scarce jobs? | by gender and education | Eswatini | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: When jobs are scarce, men should have more rights to a job than women.

On the issue of land, more than eight in 10 Eswatini (84%) say that women should have equal rights to land ownership and inheritance (Figure 5). Slightly more women (87%) than men (81%) support equal land rights.

**Figure 5: Should women have equal rights to land? | by gender | Eswatini | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: Women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land.

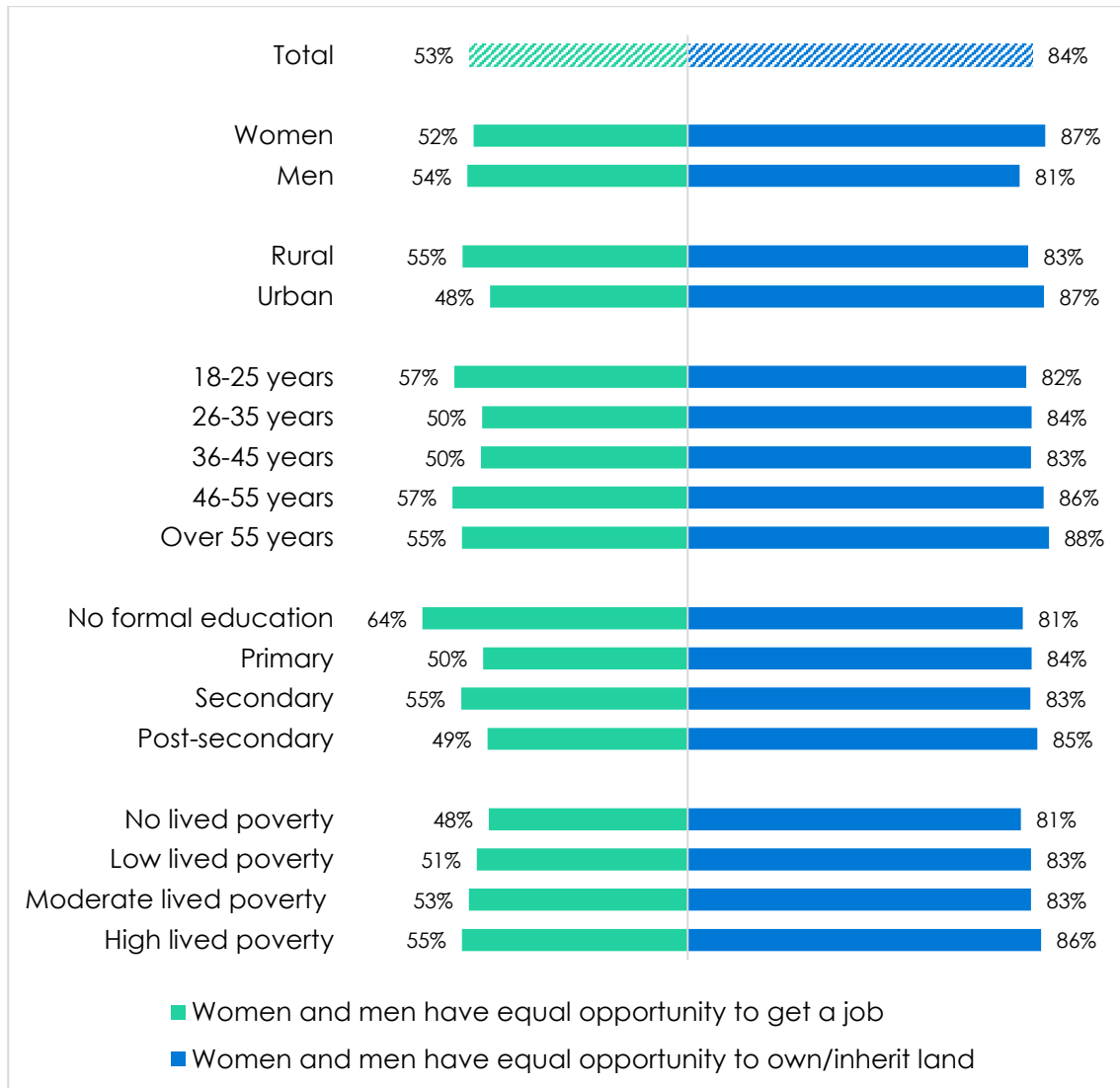
While most Eswatini support equal rights to jobs and land ownership for women, Afrobarometer data show that only 53% of citizens believe that women in the country in fact currently have the same opportunities to get jobs as men (Figure 6). This perception is less common among urban residents (48%), the most educated (49%), and the economically best-off citizens (48%) than among their rural, less educated, and poorer counterparts.<sup>1</sup>

By contrast, more than eight in 10 respondents (84%) say women and men enjoy equal opportunities to own or inherit land. Curiously, more women than men (87% vs. 81%) perceive opportunities to own land in Eswatini as gender-equal. This perception increases modestly with respondents' age, education level, and experience of lived poverty.

These findings suggest that Eswatini is doing much better at addressing inequalities in land ownership than it is at addressing them in the job market.

<sup>1</sup> Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Patel (2022).

**Figure 6: Do women and men have equal opportunities to get a job and to own/inherit land?** | by demographic group | Eswatini | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree:

*In our country today, women and men have equal opportunities to get a job that pays a wage or salary.*

*In our country today, women and men have equal opportunities to own and inherit land.*

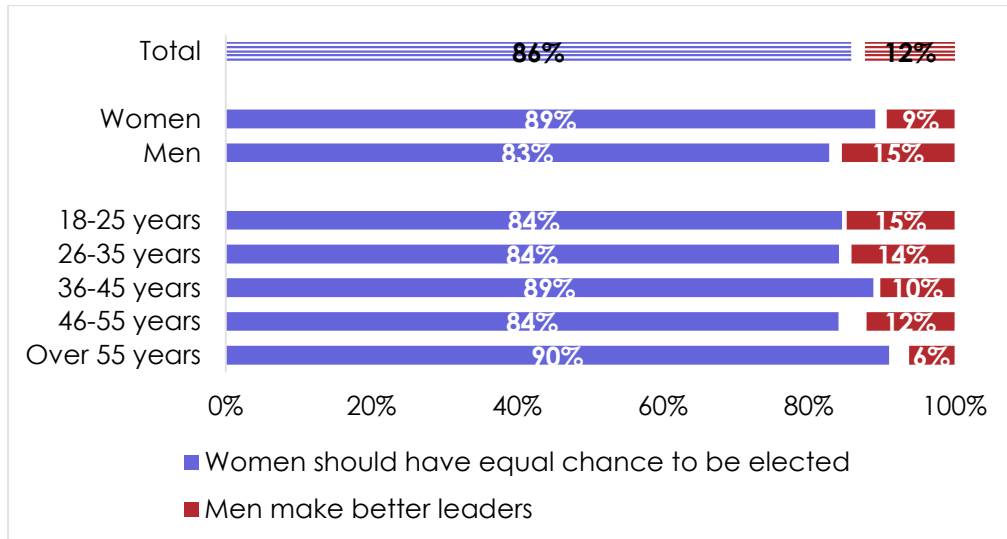
(% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

### Gender equality in political participation

One critical aspect of gender equality is women's participation in political leadership, which helps ensure that women's voices are heard in policy making.

Almost nine in 10 Eswatini (86%) say that women should have the same chance as men to be elected to political office (Figure 7). More women (89%) than men (83%) favour gender equality in political participation. Interestingly, younger citizens are less likely to support this position (84% of those aged 18-35, compared to 90% of those over age 55).

**Figure 7: Should women have an equal chance to be elected?** | by gender  
 | Eswatini | 2022

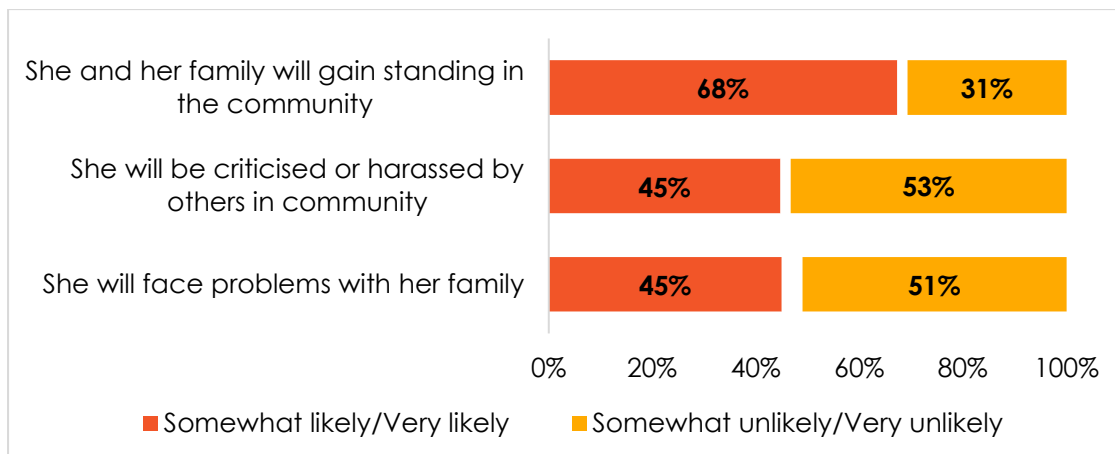


**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: Men make better political leaders than women and should be elected rather than women.  
 Statement 2: Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.  
 (% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

Even if she believes that voters will give her the same consideration as a male candidate, a woman may be further encouraged to run for public office – or discouraged from doing so – by other consequences she expects to result from her candidacy.

On the positive side, more than two-thirds (68%) of Eswatini say it is "somewhat likely" or "very likely" that a woman and her family will gain standing in the community if she runs for elected office (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: For better or for worse: How running for elected office might affect women's lives** | Eswatini | 2022



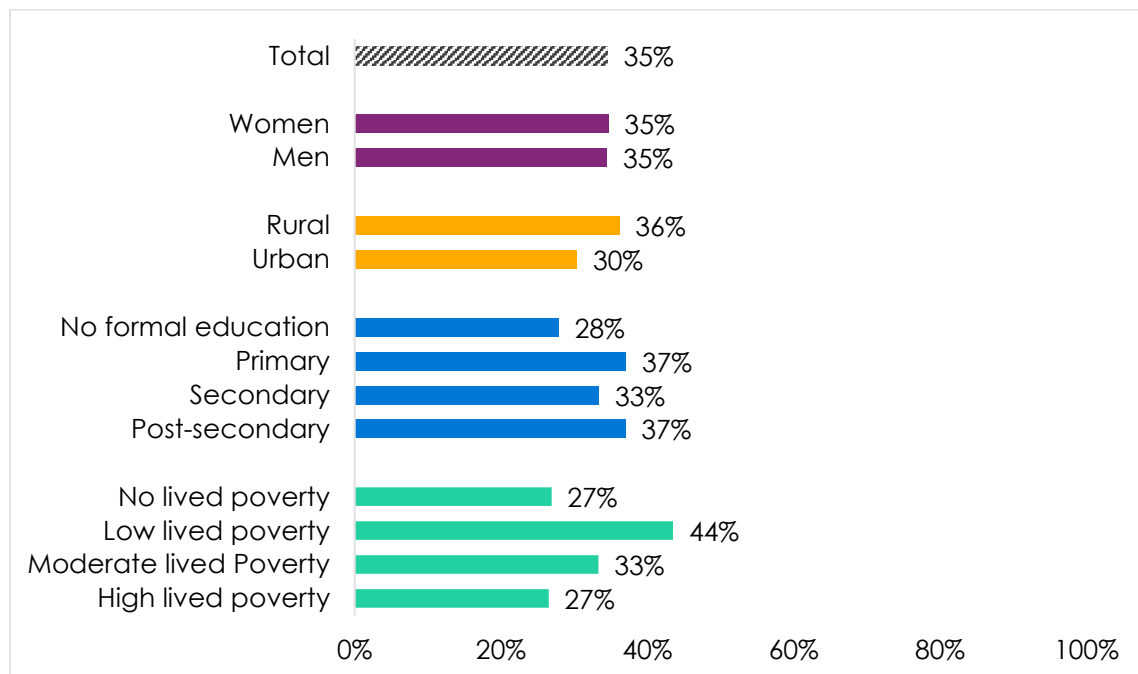
**Respondents were asked:** If a woman in your community runs for elected office, how likely or unlikely is it that the following things might occur?  
 She and her family will gain standing in the community?  
 She will be criticised, called names, or harassed by others in the community?  
 She will face problems with her family?

But almost half of respondents also say that a woman standing for election is likely to be criticised, called names, or harassed by others in the community (45%) and to face problems with her family (45%). The fact that slim majorities see these negative consequences as unlikely may or may not be enough to overcome some women's reservations about entering elective politics.

### Government performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities

Overall, only about one-third (35%) of Eswatini say the government is doing “fairly well” or “very well” in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women (Figure 9). Women and men are in agreement in their assessments of the government's performance. Approval ratings are particularly low among urban residents (30%), citizens with no formal education (28%), and both the poorest and best-off respondents (both 27%).

**Figure 9: Government performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women | Eswatini | 2022**

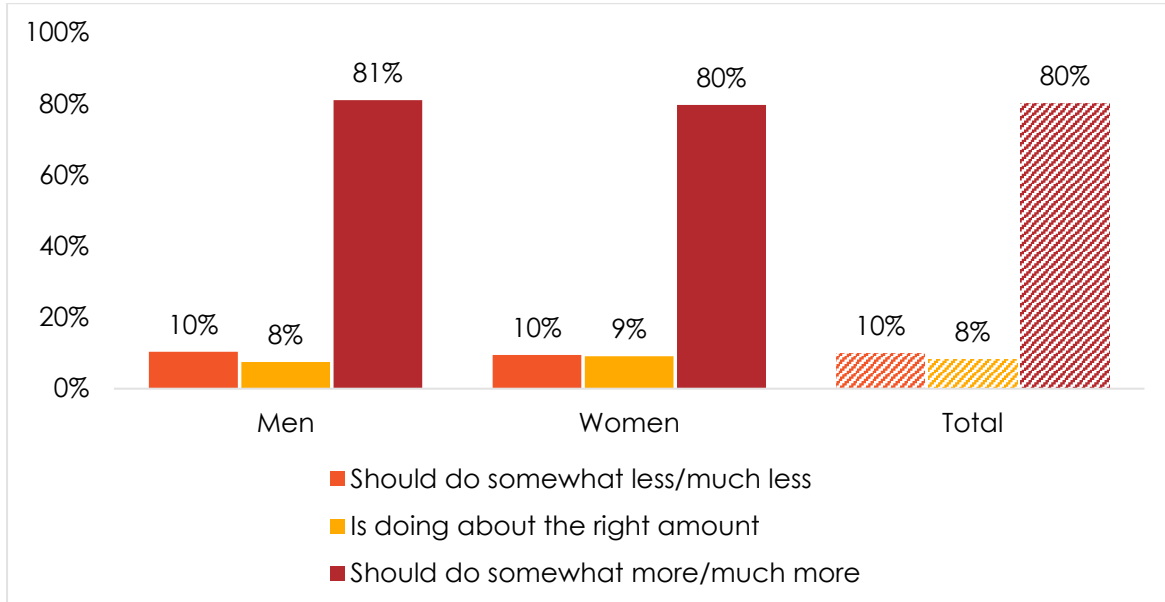


**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Promoting equal rights and opportunities for women? (% who say “fairly well” or “very well”)

Instead, an overwhelming majority (80%) of Swati citizens say the government should be doing more to promote gender equality in the country, including 51% who want to see “much more” government action on this issue. Men and women see eye to eye in their call for greater government initiative (Figure 10).



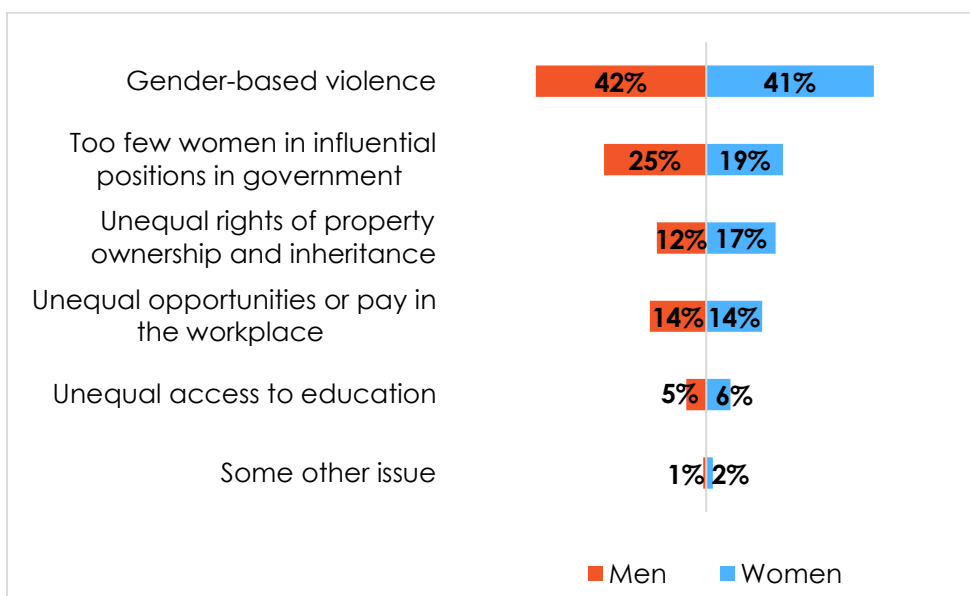
**Figure 10: Should the government do more or less to promote equal rights and opportunities for women? | by gender | Eswatini | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** *In your opinion, should government and elected officials be doing more than they are doing now to advance the rights and equality of women, or should they be doing less, or are they doing about the right amount?*

Asked what they consider to be the most important women's-rights issue for their government and society to address, about four in 10 men (42%) and women (41%) cite gender-based violence (Figure 11). In second place is the low representation of women in influential positions in government, followed by unequal rights of property ownership and inheritance, and unequal opportunities or pay in the workplace.

**Figure 11: Most important women's-rights issue | by gender | Eswatini | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** *In your opinion, which of the following issues related to women's rights and equality do you think is the most important for our government and society to address?*

## Conclusion

Most Emaswati express support for gender equality in access to paying jobs, land ownership, and the right to run for public office. Most believe that equality in land rights has been achieved, but far fewer say the same about equality in hiring, and almost half think women who run for public office are likely to face negative reactions from their family and community.

A large majority of Emaswati say that more needs to be done to promote equal rights and opportunities for women. Among women's-rights issues that their government and society must address, citizens prioritise gender-based violence and the scarcity of women in influential positions in government.

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Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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