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News release

South African women more educated than men, but more likely to be unemployed and looking for work

More South African women than men have a post-secondary education, but women are more likely than men to be unemployed and looking for work, the latest Afrobarometer survey reveals.

Women identify employers' preference for hiring men and a lack of necessary education or skills as the main barriers to women entering and moving up in the workforce. Fewer women cite a lack of remote or flexible work arrangements or say it is not socially acceptable for women to hold paid employment.

By contrast, men are more likely to blame women's lack of education or skills, and a lack of remote or flexible work arrangements. They are less likely to point to a preference for male employees as a barrier to women's advancement in the workplace.

A majority of South Africans say girls are "rarely" or "never" prevented from attending school because their families prioritise boys' education, but four in 10 believe schoolgirls are "often" or "always" discriminated against, harassed, or harangued for sexual favours by teachers.

Key findings

- About nine out of 10 South African women (89%) and men (88%) have attended secondary school, and more women than men have gone on to post-secondary education (41% vs. 31%) (Figure 1).
 - The two genders are about equally likely to lack formal schooling altogether (2% of men, 5% of women).
- Most South Africans (85%) say girls are "rarely" or "never" prevented from attending school because their families prioritise boys' education, but 13% say this happens "often" or "always" (Figure 2).
 - Three times as many (39%) report that schoolgirls are "often" or "always" discriminated against, harassed, or harangued for sexual favours by teachers, while about six in 10 respondents (58%) say this is rare or non-existent.
- Among working-age adults (aged 18-65), South African men are 9 percentage points more likely to have paid employment than women (45% vs. 36%), though men's advantage is mostly in part-time jobs (Figure 3).
 - Women are more likely than men to be unemployed and looking for work (43% vs. 35%), while the two genders are about equally likely to consider themselves outside the work force (22% women, 20% men).
- Women most commonly say the main barrier to entering and moving up in the workforce is employers' preference for hiring men (37%), followed by the idea that women lack the necessary education or skills (17%) (Figure 4). Fewer women point to

a lack of remote or flexible work arrangements (10%) or say it is not socially acceptable for women to hold paid jobs (9%), while 6% cite a lack of childcare.

- o Men rank these barriers in a similar order, but they are 13 percentage points less likely to point to a preference for male employees (24%) and more likely than women to blame a lack of education or skills (24%) and a lack of remote or flexible work arrangements (18%).
- o About one-fifth (18%) of women and one-tenth (11%) of men say women don't face particular barriers to entering and advancing in the workplace.

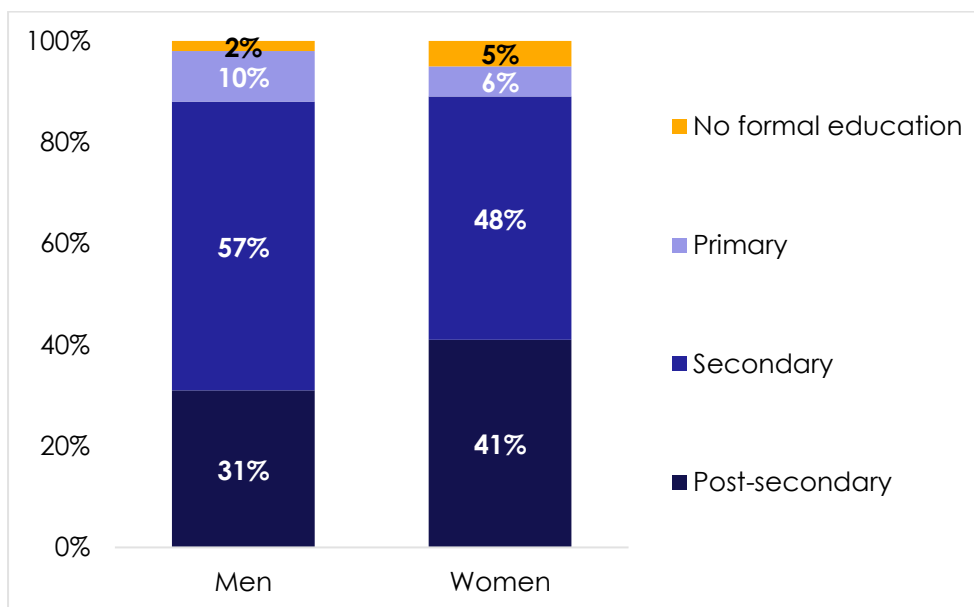
Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Ten survey rounds in up to 45 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 10 surveys (2024/2025) cover 38 countries. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in South Africa, led by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,600 adult citizens between 28 June and 19 July 2025. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2.5 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in South Africa in 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015, 2018, 2021, and 2022.

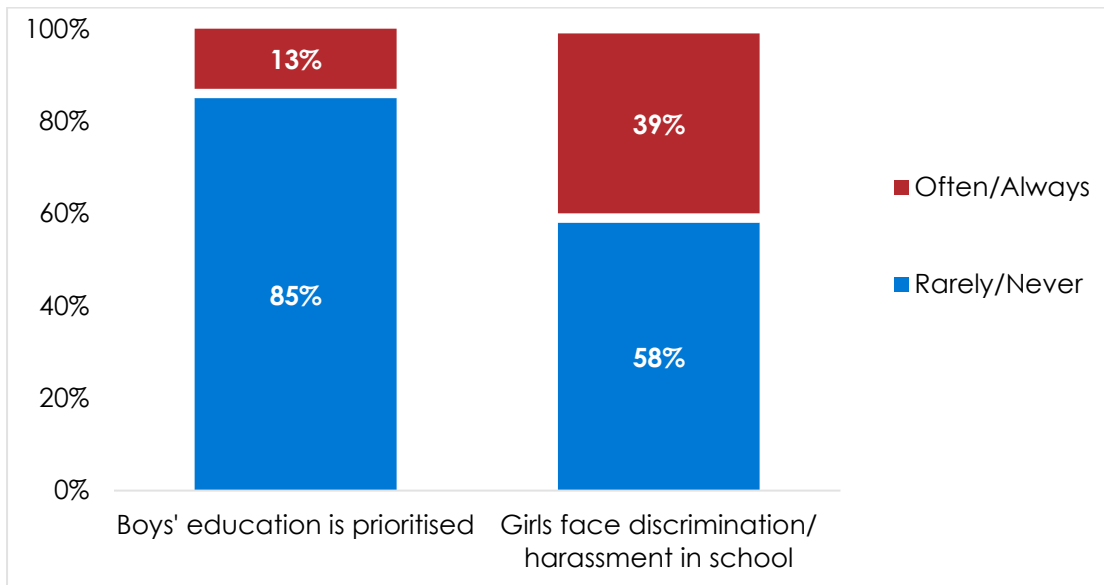
Charts

Figure 1: Level of education | by gender | South Africa | 2025



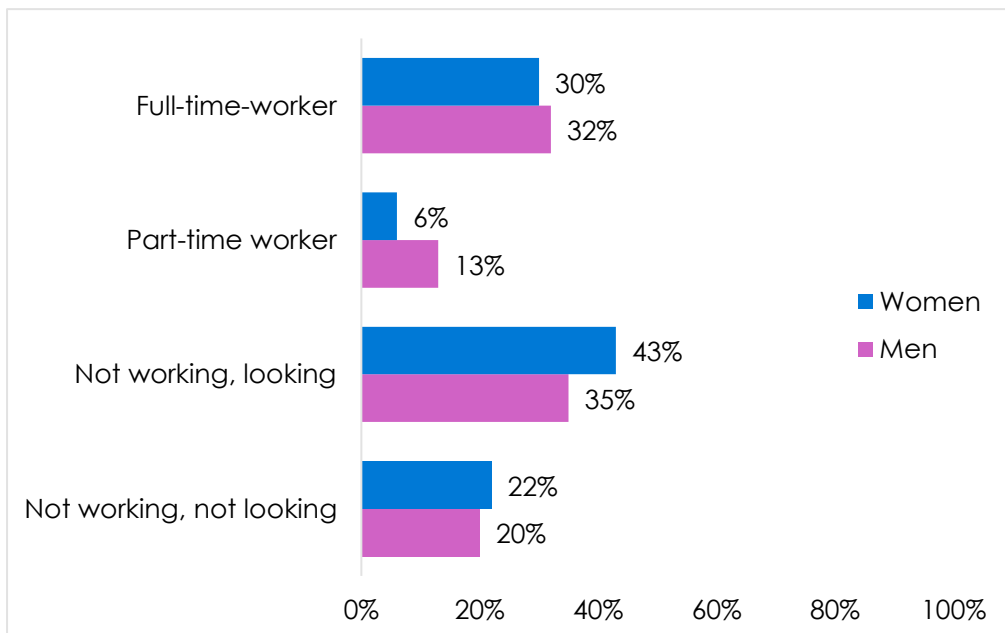
Respondents were asked: What is your highest level of education?

Figure 2: Discrimination and harassment in education | South Africa | 2025



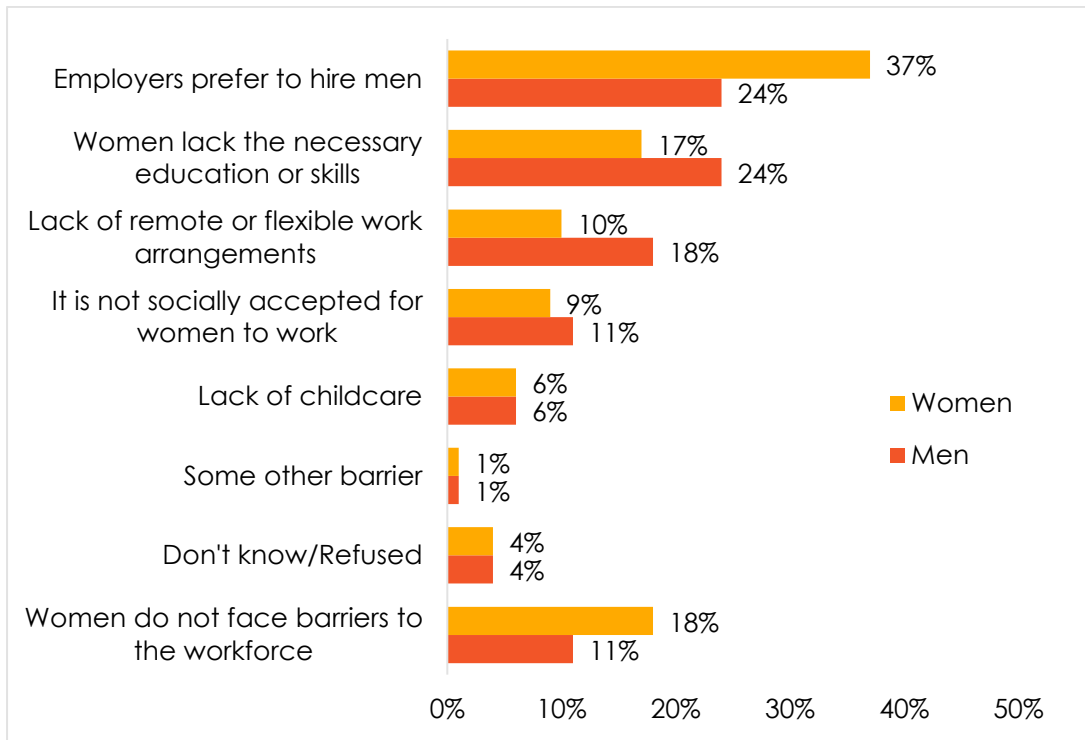
Respondents were asked: How frequently do the following things occur in your community:
 Girls are prevented from attending school because their families prioritise the education of boys?
 Girl students face discrimination, harassment, or requests for sexual favours from their teachers?

Figure 3: Employment status | 18- to 65-year-olds | by gender | South Africa | 2025



Respondents were asked: Do you have a job that pays a cash income? [If yes:] Is it full time or part time? [If no:] Are you currently looking for a job? (Respondents over age 65 are excluded.)

Figure 4: Main barrier to women’s employment | by gender | South Africa | 2025



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, which of the following is the main barrier to women entering and moving up in the workforce?*

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