Public financing to protect violence against women and children

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This chapter recognises the interconnections between violence against women (VAW) and violence against children (VAC) and explores the shape and forms of public funding of this social, economic and cultural challenge. This is admittedly a complex task and it requires us to make assumptions about what could legitimately be recognised as expenditure to combat VAC and VAW. Such an exercise is likely to both over- and under-estimate the public resources available to address VAC and VAW. Accepting a degree of error in estimating the resources available does not invalidate this analysis, instead it prepares the ground for directed and thoughtful proposals about how to rectify this information gap.

The chapter starts by outlining South Africa's legal obligations and then sketches out the continuum of care from prevention to response services. It briefly discusses the social and economic costs of violence using the latest domestic evidence available. It then considers how funding for VAC and VAW is allocated within the South African budget process, before undertaking a preliminary budget analysis of the VAC and VAW sectors. The chapter concludes with a series of recommendations to improve financing to address VAC and VAW.

What are the legal obligations to fund VAC and VAW programming?

Commitments in international and constitutional law

The right to be free from violence is protected by the Constitution (section 12) and it is inextricably linked to the rights to life, dignity and equality (sections 7, 10 and 11).[1, 2] Additionally, children have a right to be protected against maltreatment, neglect and abuse, and to social services (section 28(1)(c)-(d)). South Africa has also ratified several international and regional treaties that protect these rights amongst others the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. All of which place a legal obligation

Box 10: What are the core measures of compliance?

Progressive realisation refers to the state's obligation to take "reasonable measures" – effective steps – over time to achieve the full realisation of economic, social and cultural rights. Whilst recognising that states must balance competing priorities and that resources are limited, states must demonstrate that people's conditions are continuously improving. The state must act as expeditiously and effectively as possible. Thus, careful planning, realistic and targeted budgets, and multi-year budgeting are crucial for sustained, long-term progressive realisation of rights.

Non-discrimination Unlike progressive realisation, non-discrimination is an immediate obligation that governments must comply with without delay. To comply, economic policies, including budget allocations, must guarantee the effective enjoyment of rights without discrimination – exclusion of groups who could reasonably be included is not acceptable.

Maximum Available Resources (MAR) is a core obligation under Article 2(1) of the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, requiring states to demonstrate that they have used all their available resources to fund the progressive realisation of socio-economic rights. Under-spending due to poor planning, lack of capacity, slow disbursement or inaccessible programme design constitutes a MAR failure.

For budget analysis, progressive realisation can be measured by assessing increases in expenditure over time (adjusted for inflation), an increase in the number of beneficiaries of a policy or programme, targeted funding towards disadvantaged groups, and an increase in the overall level of enjoyment of the right.

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on the South African government to provide services to both prevent and respond to VAC and VAW (see Policy chapter on p. 113).

The government's budget is central to the realisation of rights because it serves as the primary mechanism through which a state translates its legal obligations into tangible services for women and children.[3] Section 7(2) places an obligation on the state to give effect to all the rights in the Bill of Rights but there are different levels of obligation when it comes to budgeting. Socio-economic rights including healthcare, social security, housing and education are subject to **progressive realisation to the maximum of the state's available resources**. Criminal justice and protection from violence are civil and political rights and not subject to the same legal limitations. However, in practice it is recognised that budgets are limited and that the state must balance competing interests. For example, Article 19 of the UNCRC enjoins the state to take "all **appropriate** legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse..." [emphasis added].[4]

The Constitutional Court has repeatedly held that the state has a positive obligation to protect women and children from violence, including gender-based violence (GBV).[2, 5] The state cannot meet its duty by simply passing laws it must allocate resources, train personnel, provide facilities and implement programmes – and progress can be assessed by applying the core measures of compliance as outlined in guidance from the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (see Box 10).[6]

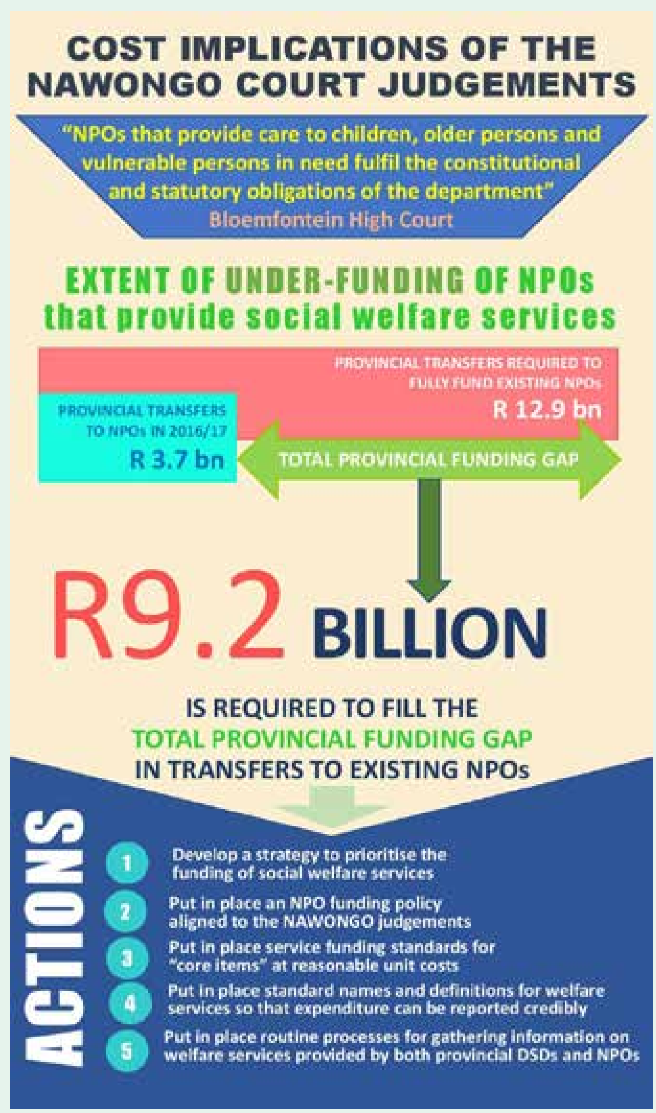
Additionally, the High Court judgments in the National Association of Welfare NGOs *(NAWONGO)* case highlight the necessity for transparent, equitable and effective funding mechanisms to uphold the rights of women and children (see Figure 19).[7-10]

What services are needed?

An estimated 33% of women have reported experiencing some form of violence in their lifetime.[11] This translates into a staggering 7.3 million women, and those who identified as Black African women had a higher estimated prevalence of violence, coming in at almost 36%.[11] More than half (56.3%) of children reported experiencing some form of victimisation, which includes maltreatment and other forms of. There is ample evidence that VAC affects – and is affected by – VAW as outlined in the chapter on violence against women and children on p. 34.

The legal obligations outlined above place a duty on government to take reasonable measures to fulfil a range of rights which includes adequately resourcing and implementing initiatives like the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (NSP-GBVF).[12] The NSP-GBVF outlines a comprehensive, multisectoral package of services to prevent and respond to VAC and VAW. This package is broadly based on the continuum of care outlined in the RESPECT framework (see p. 101). It emphasises prevention through (cyber-) awareness programmes and media campaigns to challenge social norms and promote gender-equality. The package also outlines dedicated initiatives such as parenting programmes that teach non-violent conflict resolution and gender-transformation; community worker training; school-based education and the

Figure 19: Cost implications of the NAWONGO court judgments



Source: Government Technical Advisory Centre. *Cost implications of the NAWONGO court judgments.* Pretoria: GTAC.

integration of GBV prevention into programmes to address related social issues such as alcohol abuse and HIV. It also includes the economic empowerment of women via grants and maintenance support, and the development of a standardised, adequately funded core service package for survivors.

Key components of the response package include shelters, Thuthuzela Care Centres, Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences (FCS) units at police stations, sexual offences courts, victim-friendly justice services, mental health services to promote healing, and reintegration services. The NSP-GBVF further commits to large-scale research and a resourcing plan to ensure sustainable funding for both government and NGO partners. Child protection services and child and youth care centres are also an essential part of the package of services. All services should be grounded in a victim-centred, human rights-based and inclusive approach, and practitioners need to be trained in gender-sensitive and trauma-informed approaches. An integrated response should ensure equitable access to quality care and justice for all survivors, regardless of age, location, sexual orientation or ability.

Local government is explicitly tasked with making public spaces safe and violence-free for all, especially women and children, through for example the rollout of the Safe Parks Initiative.[12] This involves undertaking safety audits, integrating factors like street lighting, and areas of concern into safety plans within Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), and applying a gender analysis to planning in the built environment and budgeting.

Extending the budget analysis to the local government sphere would however considerably complicate the exercise due to the large number of local governments, the non-coincidence of financial years across the three spheres, and the predominantly service delivery-as opposed to the policy- focus of local government. This budget analysis therefore focuses on the national and provincial spheres.

What are the social and economic costs of violence against women and children?

A KPMG study sought to identify the VAW-related costs incurred by victims, government, civil society and businesses.

Table 8: Estimates of the social and economic costs of violence against women and children

Who	Method	Key results	Overall comments
KMPG, 2014[15]	Assumed GBV prevalence rates of between 20 – 30% and subsequently monetised.	Violence against women costs the country on average between 0.9% and 1.3% of the country's GDP.	It would be useful to repeat this study using the estimated prevalence rates of GBV as per the 2022 HSRC GBV National Survey.
Save the Children, 2016[16]	Monetised the Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs).	• Physical violence against children: cost 2.6% of GDP annually. • Sexual violence: 0.9% of GDP • Child neglect: 0.16% of GDP • Fatal violence: 0.16% of GDP	Study only considered VAC. Do the prevalence rates used in this study hold across time and do costs increase or decrease over time?
Hsiao et al, 2018[17]	Cost calculations based on DALYs included: • Monetary value of DALYs lost from fatal cases of VAC as well negative health outcomes and health risk behaviours due to non-fatal forms of VAC. • Reductions in earnings due to physical and emotional violence experienced during childhood. • Child welfare costs.	• Considering fatal and non-fatal effects of VAC, the reduction in earnings, and child welfare costs, the authors estimated that VAC costs the South African economy US$15.8 billion or nearly 5% of the country's GDP (in 2015 ZAR).	All estimates are based on reported evidence, and the intensity and severity of VAC could actually be higher. Using the per capita GDP is a solid estimate given the small variation around GDP per capita over the last decade.
Kilburn et al, 2023[18]	Randomised control study in Mpumalanga with eligible young women testing for the impact of a conditional cash transfer on behaviour of young women aged 13 – 20.	• Delayed sexual debut for women who participated in study. • Reduced number of sexual partners. • As a result of factors above, a reduction in Intimate Partner Violence.	Would these results hold in a different provincial context, say Gauteng or the Western Cape?

The study built on previous research commissioned by Parliament in respect of the 2012/13 national budget. Like the parliamentary study, KPMG focused primarily on the national budget but also included the provincial Victim Empowerment Programme (VEP) allocations. KPMG put the estimated cost to government at R513,6 million, less than 2% of the full economic costs of GBV to society.[13]

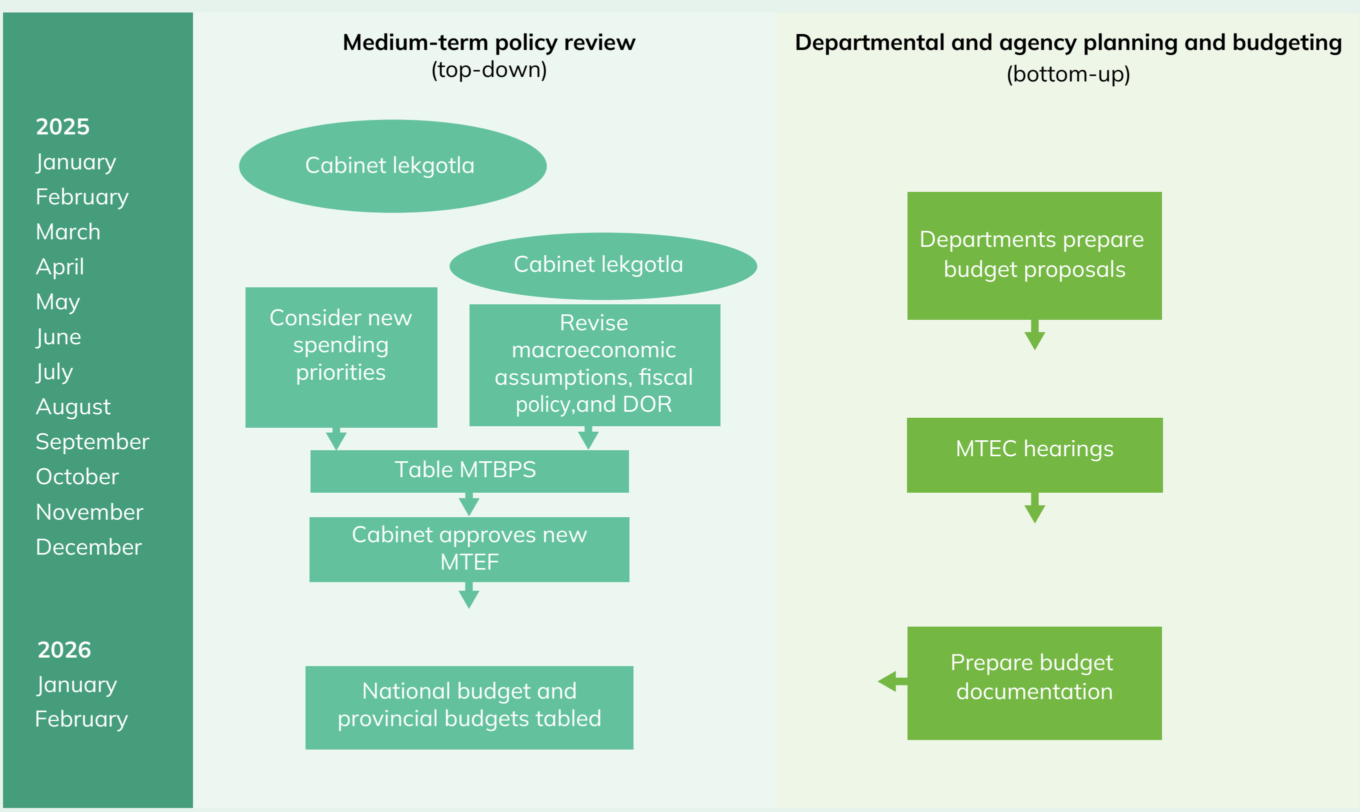
Table 8 looks at local estimates of the economic and social costs of violence against women and children, which range from 0.2% to approximately 5% of South Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). For comparison, the World Bank estimates that crime (including violence) costs the economy close to 10% of its annual GDP.[14]

How is funding allocated during the budget process?

Financing for national and sub-national governments requires careful planning, processes and involving the right stakeholders. In essence, a formal budget process is needed to maximise the probability that centrally set goals are achieved. Conventionally, these goals address the total envelope of revenue and spending; in order to determine what scarce government resources should be allocated to and why; and, how best to ensure that the public gets value for money so that every Rand is stretched to enable effective service delivery.

First, nationally collected revenue is divided vertically between the different spheres of government (national, provincial and local). This is followed by a horizontal allocation of funds within each sphere of government using demographic-based formulas to ensure equitable access to services. Provincial governments have three main sources of revenue, namely the unconditional transfer from the national government (or block grant), conditional grant funding, and their own revenue (which comprises between 3 – 5% of total provincial revenue). Prioritisation decisions at the provincial level are driven, in part, by national policy, as well as the priorities of the Provincial Executive Committee (PEC), headed by the Premier. This prioritisation goes through several iterations (budget draft submissions etc) and around December of each calendar year, provinces receive their final allocations for the next financial year. It is characteristic of the country's Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) process where both elements of budget making are involved, namely a bottom-up approach (departments put forward their bids) and a top-down approach (where final decisions about the provincial envelope are made by the extended national Cabinet) as illustrated in Figure 20.

Figure 20: Graphic representation of the national and provincial budget process in South Africa



Adapted from: Folscher A, Cole N. South Africa: Transition to democracy offers opportunity for whole system reform. *OECD Journal of Budgeting (Special Issue) Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative.* 6(2); 61-98. 2007.

South Africa introduced the MTEF for the first time in 1998.[19] Two assessments of the effectiveness of this framework and the annual budget process are discussed here. In 2007, Folscher and Cole indicated that the government has performed extremely well in terms of the grand national goals of aggregate fiscal discipline (to live within your means) and allocative efficiency (to spend the money where it is needed).[20] However, they noted that attempts at extracting maximum value from public expenditures was less successful and remained the greatest public finance challenge at the time of their contribution.

In 2023, Sachs et al provided a useful update and analysis of budget reforms and impact on overall spending in South Africa.[21] Their key contention was that frontline public services were subjected to severe austerity, and that the government has failed in its attempt at fiscal consolidation. Gross national debt remained high and there were serious questions about the credibility of macro-economic forecasts, deviation between planned and actual spending outcomes, and the government's ability to control the country's public sector wage bill. In essence, Sachs et al were questioning the very foundation of the country's public finance system and blamed the chaos on lack of policy coherence at the central level.

National Treasury has championed a series of expenditure reviews to assess the quality of spending (see the GTAC website).[iv] However, these recommendations were not fully integrated in departments' planning and the budget process, which prompted a radical re-think of these issues. In its *2026 MTEF Technical Guidelines*, National Treasury aims for what it calls "a more credible and purposeful approach" to budgeting,[23] centred on three key issues, namely a *service delivery focus, increased value for money for public services, and longer-term fiscal sustainability*. The latter includes, amongst other things, the introduction of a new mechanism called Targeted and Responsible Savings (TARS).

Under TARS the national Cabinet and other executive authorities intend to take a closer look at the recommendations emanating from spending reviews and departments' ability to implement their key recommendations. Critically, it empowers them to cut programmes that are outdated or under-performing and move scarce resources to places that are needed in the re-positioning of the country's public finances. For this process to succeed, it needs a set of rational criteria, which are not only technical in nature (as implied by TARS). There also needs to be a substantive consideration of the priorities that are deemed non-negotiable, such as the protection of children and vulnerable women.

How much is government spending on VAC and VAW services? A preliminary budget analysis

A range of departments across government play a role in preventing and responding to VAC and VAW and this makes it complicated to track. In 2015, the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), together with the Department of Social Development (DSD), commissioned KPMG to conduct a diagnostic review of government's response to violence against women and children.[24] The review included a serious attempt to identify budget allocations related to VAC and VAW in the national and provincial spheres.

KPMG approached the task by distinguishing between what it termed 'direct' and 'indirect' budget programmes (or sub-programmes). The direct programmes were those that specifically referred to VAC and VAW in their purpose, outcomes and/or indicators. The amounts allocated to them

Box 11: The impact of austerity and fiscal consolidation on VAC and VAW

The government's core spending as a share of GDP has experienced a significant reduction since the COVID-19 pandemic and is currently at its 2012 level. Going forward, National Treasury plans to cut core spending by an additional two percentage points. This fiscal consolidation specifically targets the input side of the budget, for example, lowering employment costs, however, salaries for personnel are the largest share of spending on government services like education, healthcare and criminal justice. Continuing to reduce the quantity and quality of inputs will lead to compromised service delivery and performance against policy objectives. "In practical terms, it implies poorer learning outcomes in schools, longer queues for service in hospitals and the court system, and fewer professional staff relative to the effective demand faced by government services overall" (p. 2).[22] Given that VAC and VAW initiatives typically involve police services, judicial processes, healthcare for survivors and social support programmes, these uniform cuts are likely to result in a reduction in the quantity and quality of services available to prevent and respond to violence against women and children.

iv See the Government Technical Advisory Centre's (GTAC) page on spending reviews: https://www.gtac.gov.za/pepa/spending-reviews/

Table 9: 'Direct' national and provincial budget programmes for VAC and VAW

Department	Budget programme
Social Development	Social crime prevention and victim empowerment Care and services to families Child care and protection Child and youth care centres Community-based care services to children
Health	Community-based services
Justice & Constitutional Development	Lower courts
National Prosecuting Authority	Specialised prosecution services
Basic Education	Educational enrichment services
Women	Social, political and economic participation and empowerment
South African Police Service	Crime investigation

Adapted from: KPMG. *Report on Diagnostic Review of the State Response to Violence against Women and Children.* 2016. Table 4.

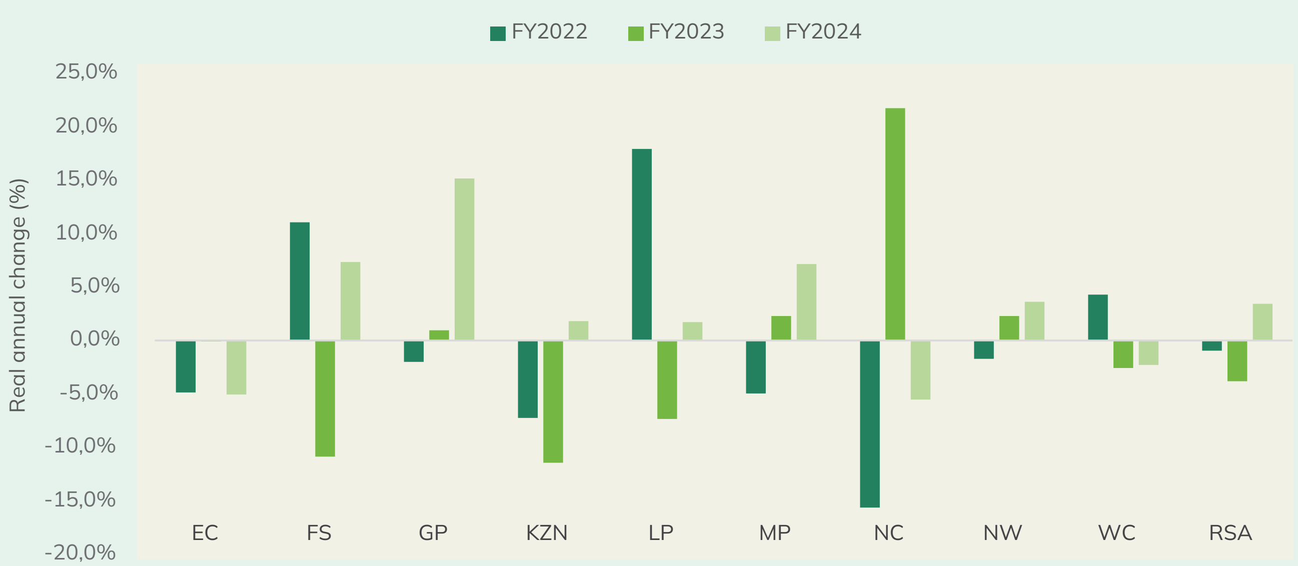
were seen as dedicated funding for VAC and VAW. Table 9 lists the budget programmes and sub-programmes identified as 'direct'. KPMG acknowledged from the start that their use of the term 'direct' did not mean that the full allocation was spent on VAC and VAW. It gave the example of the provincial Victim Empowerment Programme (VEP), which provides services for victims of VAC and VAW, but also for victims of other forms of crime and violence, including traffic accidents.

Using the KMPG classification and with our modifications, direct expenditures on VAC and VAW grew from R60 billion in FY2021 to R68 billion in FY2024 at a real average annual decrease of one per cent. During this period, most 'direct' programmes experienced an average annual decline (see Table 10 on p. 144), with the entire children and families programme of social services declining by 5% on average over this period. Only educational enrichment services (DBE) experienced a positive increase of just under 1% over the same period, but at R10 million, this constituted less than 0.01% of total direct expenditure in FY2024.

The programme on crime prevention experienced a real average decline of 1.1%. Response services in the Justice cluster are funded via spending on the lower courts (where spending declined by 1.2%), while expenditure on specialised prosecution services remained stable at 0.1%.

The provincial community-based services in health programme (health clinics and health centres), is the largest budget in our estimated 'direct' VAC and VAW expenditures. As noted previously, programmes are classified as 'direct' if they explicitly mention VAC and VAW in their objectives or include relevant outcomes or indicators. While the associated budgets are considered dedicated funds, they include services. For instance, whole of the community-based health services budget is counted, even though it includes a broad range of health services not related to VAC and VAW.[24] The overall picture within this budget was one of inconsistent and erratic spending patterns. For example, in FY2023, spending on this programme declined by almost 4% in real terms with the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal experiencing the largest declines

Figure 21: Real annual growth rates on community-based health services by province, FY2021 – FY2024 (FY2021=100)



Source: National Treasury online database (accessed in August 2025)

Table 10: Real average annual growth of 'direct' national and provincial programmes, FY2021 – FY2024 (FY2021=100)

Programme ZAR billion and ZAR million	FY2021	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024	Real average growth rate, FY2021-FY2024 (%)	Level of government
Children and families	6.7B	6.3B	6.5B	6.8B	-4.8%	National & provincial
Social crime prevention & victim empowerment	1.9B	2.0B	2.1B	2.2B	-1.7%	National & provincial
Community-based services (Health)	41.9B	44.4B	45.1B	48.5B	-0.4%	Provincial
Lower courts	5.2B	5.6B	5.8B	5.9B	-1.2%	National
Specialised prosecution services	3.6B	3.8B	4.1B	4.3B	0.1%	National
Educational enrichment services	8.4M	8.8M	9.6M	10.1M	0.8%	National
Women	113.3M	124.6M	112.6M	129.3M	-0.4%	National
Crime investigation	13.9M	14.4M	14.4M	15.5M	-1.6%	National
Crime prevention	40.9M	41.0M	43.0M	46.3M	-1.1%	National
Total	**59.6B**	**62.3B**	**63.8B**	**67.8B**	**-1.0%**	

Source: National Treasury online database (accessed in August 2025)
Note 1: "B" stands for billions and "M" for millions
Note 2: KPMG listed the different sub-programmes of the Children and Families programme separately, but in this analysis, we consolidated them as a single line item which incorporates both direct and indirect expenditures. We have also added crime prevention as an important entry, even though it's scope goes far beyond VAC and VAW.

of -11% and -12% respectively. Expenditures in the Northern Cape were highly positive in FY2022 (22%), while Gauteng experienced the largest real annual increase in FY2024 (15%).

Turning our attention to 'indirect' expenditures, the final list of expenditures chosen differs from what KMPG had proposed in 2015 (see Table 11). Social work scholarships had been discontinued, "children" and "families" were included in the children and families programme under 'direct' expenditures, and given the central role of social grants in improving the lives of South Africans overall, they were considered as a separate expenditure line.

Expenditures on programmes that indirectly impact VAC and VAW grew from R13.1 billion in FY2021 to R16.1 billion in FY2024 at a real average annual rate of 1.7%. Most of these expenditures are focused on response as opposed to prevention services. Expenditures on violence, trauma and medical emergency services grew at a real average annual rate of close to 3% while all other indirect programmes experienced solid positive growth over the period as depicted in Table 12 on p. 146, except for family advocates (-0.3%) and rehabilitation programmes offered by Correctional Services (-3.0%).

The Civilian Secretariat for Police Service handles complaints about SAPS investigations into reports of domestic violence. The provincial expenditures are inconsistent and change in unexpected ways. As an example, the Gauteng province experienced a 31% increase in FY2023 but were expected to have an almost 20% annual decline in FY2024. In fact, it is the large real growth in Gauteng that turned the national average positive in FY2023 as most provinces experienced a negative decline. By FY2024, only the Eastern Cape (13.3%), Mpumalanga (56%) and North-West experienced double digit growth rates, while the overall rate of spending on this programme declined by almost 5% in that same financial year.

Social protection can be seen as a preventative measure against violence, the Kilburn et al (2023) study reinforces the centrality of social grants in combating the social ills of VAC and VAW. Figure 23 on p. 146 examines the spending social grants provided by the DSD. The Old Age Grant shows the largest real average growth rate of close to 3% over this period 2021 to 2024, while the Care Dependency Grant and the Foster Child Grant increased by 2.4% annually. The Disability Grant grew on average by 1.1 per cent, after an almost 2% decline in FY2022.

Expenditure on the elderly, people with disabilities and children in alternative care has been protected. However, the largest group of women and children who would be protected by cash transfers receive the Child Support Grant (CSG). The value of the CSG grew by a mere 0.2% after successive real declines of 1.3% and 0.2% in FY2022 and FY2023 respectively. In fact, the real value of the CSG has eroded since its inception and it is

Table 11: 'Indirect' national and provincial budget programmes for VAC and VAW

Department	Programme
Social Development	Children (included ECD in 2015) Families Social worker scholarships Substance abuse, prevention and rehabilitation ECD & partial care
Health	Violence, trauma and emergency medical services
Education	School sport, culture and media services
Women	Communication and outreach initiatives
Community Safety	Provincial secretariat for police services/ civilian oversight
Justice & Constitutional Development	Family advocates
Correctional Services	Rehabilitation
South African Police Service	Crime prevention

Adapted from: KPMG. *Report on Diagnostic Review of the State Response to Violence against Women and Children. Summary Version.* 2016. Table 5.

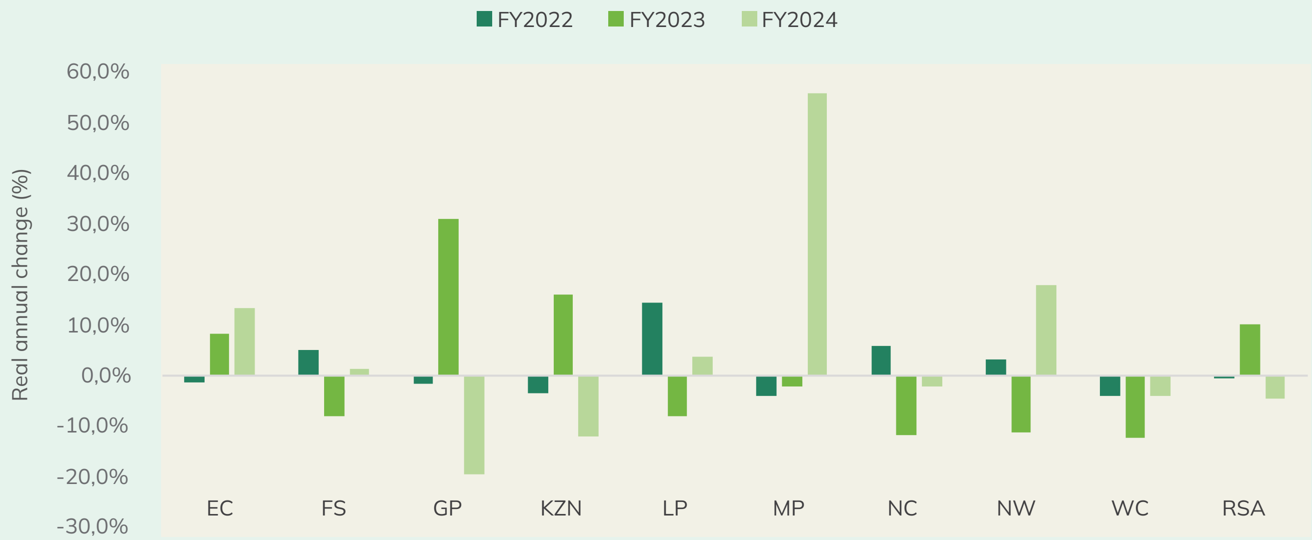
not sufficient to lift children above the food poverty line.[25] Food insecurity is associated with increased physical intimate partner violence perpetration, therefore the reduction in value of the CSG undercuts its value as a violence prevention mechanism.

Does funding support equitable access to services?

An analysis of the provincial DSD's Children and Families (direct expenditure) budget in FY2015 showed that disparities in provincial allocations became even more pronounced when focusing specifically on children from poor families.[v] When looking at all children, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape allocated approximately R205 per child which is about 39% of the R530 allocated by the Northern Cape. However, when the analysis was limited to poor children, the gap widened significantly: The Eastern Cape allocated just R264 per poor child, compared to Gauteng's R1,323, which is more than five times higher.[26] UNICEF's similar analysis of childcare and protection[27] confirmed further that the mean amount allocated per child varied enormously between provinces.

Furthermore, South Africa currently lacks uniform funding norms for shelters resulting in significant disparities in the allocation of funds across provinces. In 2020, for example, subsidies ranged from as little as R9 to R71 per person per day depending on the province.[28] These discrepancies affect both the amounts allocated and the specific costs covered, leading to inconsistent support for shelters nationwide. Moreover, there are marked provincial differences in funding levels relative to service needs across all areas, not only shelter provision.[26, 29, 30] Despite provincial governments bearing the responsibility to budget for social welfare services, some have failed to prioritise these services adequately. In some provinces there are significant urban rural divides.[26, 31, 32]

Figure 22: Real annual growth rates in Provincial Secretariat for Police, by province, FY2021 – FY2024 (FY2021=100)



Source: National Treasury online database (accessed in August 2025)

v Defined as those below the upper bound poverty line.

Table 12: Real average annual growth of 'indirect' national and provincial programmes, FY2021 – FY2024 (FY2021=100)

Programme (ZAR billion and ZAR million)	FY2021	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024	Real average growth rate, FY2021-FY2024 (%)	Level of government
Substance abuse, prevention & rehabilitation	1.1B	1.2B	1.1B	1.3B	0.4%	National & provincial
Violence, trauma, and emergency medical services	8.8B	9.8B	10.5B	11.2B	2.6%	National & provincial
School sport, culture & media services	182.2M	281.4M	301.0M	355.8M	19.8%	Provincial
Oversight and provincial secretariat for police	715.0M	763.0M	882.5M	874.0M	1.5%	National & provincial
Family advocates	248.6M	270.0M	288.3M	289.0M	-0.3%	National
Rehabilitation (Correctional Services)	2.0B	2.1B	2.3B	2.1B	-3.0%	National
Total	**13.1B**	**14.5B**	**15.4B**	**16.1B**	**1.7%**	

Source: National Treasury online database (accessed in August 2025)

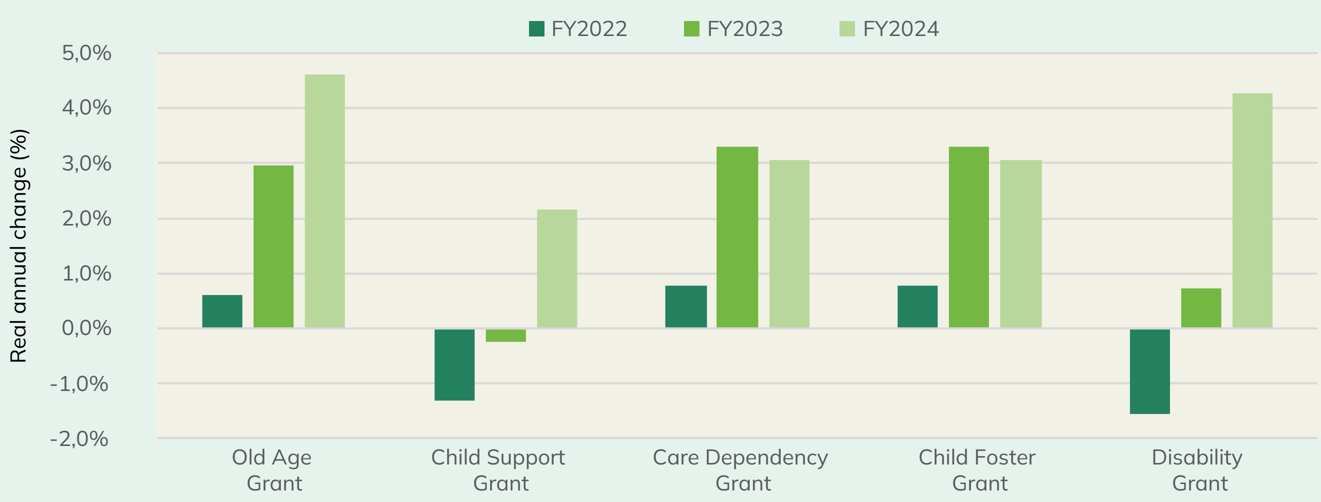
Does public financing of the fight against VAC and VAW meet the core measures of compliance?

This cursory analysis of funding that is dedicated to VAC and VAW suggests that it was subject to the same degree of expenditure cuts experienced elsewhere in the public sector. Cutting funding on nationally agreed priorities is considered a **retrogressive measure** by the courts, therefore South Africa is not meeting its constitutional obligations to progressively realise women and children's rights to health and social services.

The nature of the South African annual budget process, which involves trade-offs among large function groups, does not necessarily offer any relief in terms of the sustained and consistent funding for VAC and VAW. As was mentioned earlier in this paper, expenditure on VAC and VAW cuts across functions, departments and spending entities, thus making it hard to track and direct funding for VAC and VAW. One option is to include 'earmarked' allocations within the provincial equitable shares, but there is no genuine protection for such funds, and these allocations are too small to make a meaningful difference in the total resources allocated for VAC and VAW.

Progressive realisation requires that we see an increase in the overall level of enjoyment of the right. However, data from the Gauteng Care Crisis Committee (Case 25) indicates a decrease in the number of beneficiaries and closure of services.

Figure 23: Real annual growth rates on the main social grants, FY2021 – FY2024 (FY2021=100)



Source: National Treasury online database (accessed in August 2025)

Furthermore, provincial disparities in spending are leading to inequitable access to services which is an infringement of the **non-discrimination** principle.

In a study commissioned by the Government Technical Advisory Centre, Barberton and Abdool[33] used a range of inequality measures to demonstrate the extent of provincial inequities in the financing of social welfare services, the low absolute base of social welfare services, and the persistent real declines in financing across most provinces. Developing a simple per capita measure, which takes social welfare spending divided by the number of poor people per province, they were able to show substantial negative and positive deviations from this imagined per person spending, further reinforcing the degree of variation among provinces in their commitment to social welfare spending. This is primarily an equity and adequacy issue with social welfare budgets and the fact that social development spending continues to be dominated by spending on social assistance.

While much attention is rightly placed on the inadequate funding for GBV services, it is equally important to scrutinise how existing funds are managed. For example, in 2024, the Gauteng DSD returned R554 million[34] in unspent funds to the provincial treasury – a staggering figure considering the acute funding crises faced by GBV shelters in the same province. This paradox exposes deeper systemic issues in the funding landscape which manifest as poor planning, bureaucratic inefficiencies and a lack of accountability in the distribution of public funds. These systemic failures persist despite repeated national and provincial commitments to addressing GBV. In addition to the inadequacy of the funding, administrative processes are bureaucratic and burdensome with delayed payments diminishing the ability of shelters to meet the needs of women and children[31] (see Case 25).

Case 25: The Gauteng Care Crisis Committee – evidence of maladministration

The Gauteng Care Crisis Committee (GCCC), representing numerous non-profit organisations (NPOs) providing essential social services, initiated legal action against the Gauteng Department of Social Development (DSD) due to significant funding delays and administrative failures that jeopardised services for vulnerable populations, including victims of GBV and children in need of protection. They presented evidence to the court that the funding crisis has had tangible impacts on services and beneficiaries, as several GBV shelters, including those operated by People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) and the Nisaa Institute for Women's Development, were forced to close due to the funding crisis.

A major structural challenge lies in the siloed nature of budgeting and service delivery. As highlighted in the KPMG review, "siloed budgets are not an effective use of limited funds and do not support effective implementation" (p. iii).[24] Departments continue to plan and manage budgets independently, which prevents the kind of integrated and efficient funding approach necessary for an effective response to VAC and VAW. The current system fails to capitalise on opportunities for streamlined administration, more precise role definitions, and the use of technology to optimise the deployment of a workforce already stretched thin by skills shortages – particularly in the social services sector.[24] Underspending and poor administration contravene the principle of spending to the **maximum extent of available resources**.

Does the difficulty in identifying expenditures and allocations on VAC and VAC necessitate a change in the country's Standard Chart of Accounts[vi]? Not necessarily, as the government is now experimenting with climate and gender responsive budgets, and it remains important that such pilots are seen through comprehensively, and the lessons learned could be used to reform the classification of VAC and VAW expenditures. The expeditious approval and implementation of the DSD Sector Funding Policy (see Case 26 on p. 148) will also help, given its strong focus on prevention and other relevant social welfare expenditures.

The nice fit between the SFP and the tweaked annual budget holds promise for spending on items that have a direct relationship to VAC and VAW. However, while this proposed policy covers a significant proportion of VAC and VAW expenditure, even greater expenditure is covered in health, education and justice budgets, where there are no mechanisms in place to prioritise or protect expenditure on VAC and VAW.

Current government responses to violence against women and children remain heavily weighted toward short-term, acute interventions and the criminal justice system, with insufficient investment in prevention and long-term rehabilitation.[vii] Yet, women's long-term needs extend well beyond immediate safety.

vi A standard chart of accounts (SCOA) in the public sector is a framework for classifying government financial transactions to ensure consistency and transparency across all departments.

vii While this chapter does not argue against a prevention orientation, it does present a more nuanced view articulating the need for the government to respond to the excesses of VAC and VAW, while engineering programmatic shifts and reforms that would put prevention at the heart of all government departments.

Case 26: Ring-fencing funding for prevention through the Sector Funding Policy

Carmen Abdoll[i]

In 2023, the national Department of Social Development (DSD) introduced the Sector Funding Policy (SFP), which aligned government's approach to funding developmental social services delivered by non-profit organisations with the NAWONGO rulings.[7]

The NAWONGO case (2010 – 2014) was brought by the National Association of Welfare Organisations and NGOs against the Free State DSD over chronic underfunding of NPOs delivering statutory welfare services. In a series of four rulings, the High Court found that government cannot treat such services as optional subsidies, since NPOs providing care to children, older persons and other vulnerable groups are fulfilling the state's constitutional and statutory obligations. The court required a new funding model that is transparent, equitable, and progressively works toward covering the full costs of mandated services, rejecting the old 'take it or leave it' approach.

A key proposal of the 2023 SFP was that "a fixed percentage of the total budget (of provincial DSDs) must be allocated to prevention and early intervention".[35] Earlier drafts suggested this percentage be set at 5%. The purpose of ring-fencing the funds is to ensure that prevention and early intervention activities[ii] are protected, as statutory[iii] and response services[iv] historically consume the bulk of provincial budgets. It represents a strategic investment in the country's social and economic future.

Although mentioned in DSD's 2023/24 Annual Performance Plan and a November 2024 parliamentary presentation,[36] implementation of the SFP has seemingly stalled. The parliamentary presentation offered no timeframes, and the 2024/25 Annual Performance Plan doesn't mention the policy. This suggests that DSD may have decided not to proceed, raising concerns about government's commitment to comply with the 2014 NAWONGO rulings.[v]

Continued underfunding of prevention interventions undermines progress in addressing the root causes of vulnerability, poverty and violence. Advocacy is needed to pressure national and provincial DSDs to implement the SFP, especially the fixed-percentage rule, in order to secure sustained investment in prevention and early intervention and advance the fight against violence against women and children.

i Cornerstone Economic Research
ii Prevention and early intervention action areas listed by the SFP include positive parenting and family promotion, intimate partner violence, prevention of substance use disorders, and social crime prevention.
iii For example, foster care, child and youth care centres (CYCCs) and services to older people.
iv For example, removing and placing a child at risk of harm in a CYCC or foster care, women's shelters and Thuthuzela Care Centres.
v Including policy implementation within an APP is a clear signal of intent, accountability and commitment, obliging the department to report publicly on progress and achievements against stated objectives.

Continued access to psychosocial services, childcare, housing and income security are critical to their ability to recover and regain independence. Despite the clear importance of these services, they are the least funded. For example, the absence of safe, affordable and government-subsidised post-shelter accommodation for women and their children is a critical gap that leaves many survivors at risk of returning to unsafe environments.[31]

Conclusion

President Cyril Ramaphosa has consistently emphasised the urgent need to end gender-based violence and femicide, and described it as a "national crisis", a "profound violation of human rights", and the country's "second pandemic".[37-39] However, examining the budget against the core measures of compliance – including progressive realisation, no retrogression, non-discrimination, and the maximum available resources – reveals that the South African Government is failing to uphold its constitutional and international obligations to protect women and children from violence.

Going forward the government should address legislative gaps by strengthening the legal framework and ensuring that the Victim Support Services Bill includes robust provisioning clauses. Implementation of the Sector Funding Policy would help standardise agreement processes, improve timelines of payments, and promote a more consultative funding relationship with NPOs.

Over the short- to medium-term, it is unrealistic for the government to abandon its response orientation (and concomitant funding), but it does bear an obligation to move the country to a more acceptable and sustained prevention orientation in the long-term. Given the scale of violence in South Africa and its compounding and intergenerational effects, government should finetune its policy response

Case 27: Children's participation in public budget advocacy

Xolane Ndlovu[i] *and Christina Nomdo*[i]

> "When I was 14 years old, I spoke to National Parliament about their budgeting and how to make it child friendly (based on the opinions of myself and my fellow Child Government Monitors). The CGMs and the National Treasury then worked together to create "The Cool Kids Guide to the Budget".[40] Being part of this process truly made me feel accomplished. It felt overwhelming, yet I was very proud of myself to have made this type of history (as the youngest person to address a Committee about budget policy)." Tara Hendricks, Child Government Monitor

Since 2020, the Western Cape Commissioner for Children (WCCC) and child government monitors (CGMs) have been actively involved in advocating for the realisation of children's rights and making budget submissions to national, provincial and local government. These submissions aimed to ensure that children's perspectives were included in government budget policy, and that budget allocations prioritised children's services.[41]

For the National 2023 Medium Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS), the Commissioner consulted with more than 50 CGMs who recommended a more child-centred approach to governance and more effective child-friendly communication methods such as child-friendly budgets. The CGMs also reviewed the spending priorities of the Western Cape government and made a submission on the 2024/5 budget for the Bitou Municipality.

A deeper analysis of budget implementation occurred in 2024 through the #Followthemoney campaign. The CGMs attended the Western Cape Health and Wellness Budget Vote and requested evidence that the health system was child- and family-focused. The Head of Department of Health and Wellness enabled the CGMs and the Commissioner to visit health facilities where they engaged with healthcare professionals and identified opportunities to enhance the delivery of healthcare services to children. The CGMs then submitted their findings and recommendations to the Head of Health and Wellness in written, oral and poster formats.

These efforts highlight critical opportunities to enable child-centred and child-friendly governance by including the voices of children and considering the impact of budget decisions on future generations.

i Western Cape Commissioner for Children

in order to sustain response interventions whilst steadily expanding the delivery of much-needed prevention and early intervention services. To this end, it would be helpful to develop and cost a minimum core package of VAC and VAW services and prioritise its consistent funding across all provinces. This package should include shelters, Thuthuzela Care Centres, FCS units, prevention programmes in schools and communities, gender-transformative parenting support, and victim-friendly justice services. Its implementation would ensure that survivors receive comprehensive, quality care regardless of where they live. Ultimately, while expenditure analysis is critical, it must be grounded in well-defined questions and aligned with clear, actionable goals. A more integrated, transparent and impact-oriented budgeting process – backed by strong provisioning clauses, costed implementation plans and meaningful interdepartmental coordination – is essential to realise women and children's rights to be free from violence.

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