

## MEDIA STATEMENT

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Issued by the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities  
Attention: Journalists and News Editors  
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### ACCESS TO JUSTICE IS KEY TO ENDING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EXCLUSION IN SOUTH AFRICA

**Pretoria:** Access to justice for women in South Africa remains a critical yet often overlooked driver of economic inclusion. While the country boasts one of the most progressive constitutional and legislative frameworks globally, many women continue to face significant barriers in enforcing their rights and participating meaningfully in the economy.

The ability of women to access justice—through courts, legal aid, and protection mechanisms—is fundamental to unlocking economic opportunities. When women can claim their labour rights, secure property ownership, and challenge discrimination, they are better positioned to achieve financial independence and contribute to economic growth.

However, structural challenges persist. High legal costs, limited legal awareness, geographic barriers, and deeply entrenched social norms continue to prevent many women—particularly those in rural and township communities—from accessing justice.

Institutions such as Legal Aid South Africa and the Commission for Gender Equality play a vital role in bridging this gap, but require strengthened support and resourcing to meet growing demand. Importantly, gender-based violence (GBV) remains both a social and economic crisis. Survivors often face loss of income, job insecurity, and long-term financial hardship.

Legal protections provided under frameworks such as the Domestic Violence Act of South Africa are essential in enabling women to escape cycles of abuse and rebuild their economic lives. Without timely and effective justice, these cycles are perpetuated.

The realities of the informal economy, where many women earn a living, highlight the urgent need for accessible legal protections. The absence of contracts, weak enforcement of rights, and vulnerability to exploitation underscore the importance of innovative legal solutions, including mobile courts and community-based legal services.

Access to justice also extends to legal identity. Without essential documentation such as identity documents and birth certificates, many women remain excluded from financial systems, social protection, and formal employment opportunities. Ensuring universal access to documentation is therefore a foundational step toward economic inclusion.

To address these challenges, there is an urgent need for a coordinated, gender-responsive approach that strengthens legal services, expands community outreach, and integrates justice into broader economic empowerment programmes.

Access to justice is not a peripheral issue; it is central to achieving gender equality and inclusive economic development. A justice system that works for women is a necessary condition for an economy that works for all.

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