* **Population Sex Disaggregation: 49.0% male to 51.0% female[[1]](#endnote-2)**
* **Population Age Disaggregation: <5 years 17.2%; 5-19 years 41.6%; 20-55 years 33.8%; 55+ years 7.4%[[2]](#endnote-3)**
* **Average household size: 4.4[[3]](#endnote-4)**
* **Female headed households: 22%[[4]](#endnote-5)**
* **Literacy Rates 15-24 years: male 69%; female 58%[[5]](#endnote-6)**
* **Infant Mortality rates: 42 per 1000 live births[[6]](#endnote-7)**
* **Maternal Mortality rate: 574 per 100,000 live births[[7]](#endnote-8)**

# Gender in Brief

**Introduction:**

Malawi, located in Southern Africa and bordered by the huge Lake Malawi, is home to a diverse population of more than 18 million. The country is home to a variety of languages, religions, and ethnic groups. Extremely dependent on foreign aid, efforts have been made in recent years to draw more attention to gender inequality in Malawi. However, the country still ranks 173 out of 178 on the Gender Inequality Index as of 2014.[[8]](#endnote-9) With a rural fertility rate of 4.8 and an urban rate of 3.0, environmental concerns, the spread of HIV/AIDS, and widespread corruption have left the country struggling to improve outcomes related to health and education for the fast-growing population.[[9]](#endnote-10)

**Gender Roles and Responsibilities**:

Malawi is considered a patriarchal society, with men holding most of the authority within the family unit. Women are responsible for household upkeep and child-rearing, while men are more likely to be the earners for the family. The 2016 Global Gender Gap reports women are also active in the economic sphere, with 81% of women working (compared to 80% of men).[[10]](#endnote-11) Women do all the cooking, and males and females often eat separately. Family plays an important role in Malawian society, and relatives often live near each other or in adjoining houses. Elders in the family are to be respected, particularly male ones.

Marriage in Malawi is common and expected, with arranged marriages still taking place in rural areas. Dowry, often paid in livestock, is also customary. As most people in the country are religious, it is a socially conservative place where gender norms are respected. Decision-making power for women is relatively limited, with 44% of women reporting their husband solely makes the decisions related to their own healthcare, and 69% reporting their husband makes sole decisions related to major household purchases.[[11]](#endnote-12)Children, especially girls, are raised to be obedient and to help with chores such as fetching water and collecting wood in rural areas, and helping with childcare in more urban areas.

**Education and Economic Empowerment:**

Primary school is from age 6-13, with an option for secondary school through age 17. Most Malawian children do not complete their full schooling as they are forced to drop out to help with agriculture or with taking care of younger siblings. Within Malawi, 19% of women overall have never attended any formal school, compared with 11% of men.[[12]](#endnote-13) Women are also generally less exposed to the outside world than men, with a higher proportion of men listening to the radio, reading newspapers, or watching television at least once a week.[[13]](#endnote-14) Higher education is uncommon in Malawi. Though a few institutions exist, most students from wealthier families choose to go abroad for their higher studies.

True figures capturing women’s labour outside of housework are hard to identify, as many women work on family farms or in family businesses but do not consider this to be “work.” Sometimes this labour is compensated, sometimes not, but women frequently earn less than men for the same types of labour. Of those women who are married and earning money, 40% report that decisions about how their income is spent are made primarily by their husbands.[[14]](#endnote-15) Most women work in the agricultural sector (58%), followed by the sales and service sector (25%); most men also work in agriculture (48%), followed by skilled labour (18%) and then sales and services (16%).[[15]](#endnote-16) 20% of children ages 5-14 are thought to be working, often in poor conditions, primarily in the tea and tobacco industries.[[16]](#endnote-17) This labour interferes with their ability to gain an education and can be damaging to their health.

**Participation and Policy:**

Despite having had a female president from 2012-2014, overall women’s participation in Malawian politics is limited. Participation peaked in 2009 with 23% of the total members of parliament being female, a figure that fell back to 17% in 2014.[[17]](#endnote-18) A number of laws have been passed to help protect women’s rights, to varying degrees of effectiveness. The 2011 Deceased Estates Bill gives women legal right to inheritance after the death of her husband. However, this has been hard to enforce in practice, and female illiteracy has contributed to a lack of knowledge regarding basic rights. The justice system is also considered inefficient and generally unhelpful towards protecting women’s rights. The 2006 Prevention of Domestic Violence Act protects women against physical, emotional, financial and sexual abuse; however it does not account for marital rape.[[18]](#endnote-19) There are a number of women’s groups in Malawi seeking to educate women on their rights, train them in useful skills, and/or offer small microfinance loans to increase their productivity.

**Gender-Based Violence and Protection:**

Malawi is party to Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and is a signatory to the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, signaling its commitment towards reducing incidences of gender-based violence (GBV). However, women are still at risk for GBV. Almost 15% of women in Malawi reported their first sexual experience happened against their will.[[19]](#endnote-20) Two out of five women reported they had experienced sexual or physical violence at some point.[[20]](#endnote-21) This violence is usually perpetrated by a current or former partner. Among women experiencing violence, less than 4% went to the local police to seek help, a testament to cultural stigmas, lack of awareness, and police ineffectiveness. Child marriage is an issue of particular concern in Malawi. Different laws state the legal age for marriage to be either 18 or 21, granting the possibility to marry younger with parental consent. More than half of all women aged 25-49 were married by 18.[[21]](#endnote-22) Marriage at a young age can contribute to poorer education and health outcomes, as well as increase the likelihood for abuse. Further, nearly half of all 19 year-old women have had a live birth, a phenomenon that can be dangerous for both young mother and child.[[22]](#endnote-23) Poverty contributes to the likelihood of child marriage, as families might see daughters as an economic burden or perceive marriage as a chance at a better life. HIV/AIDS is another issue of concern in Malawi, with less than half of those between ages 15-24 having knowledge of HIV prevention methods.[[23]](#endnote-24) Finally, despite facing pressure from international donors for its poor treatment of LGBT people, and remarks from the president expressing interest in relaxing its related policies, the country has not made any significant strides towards decriminalising any of its anti-gay laws.

**Gender in Emergencies**:

As women are the primary caretakers of the household, disasters affecting access to resources will disproportionately affect women and girls. For example, as the primary collectors of water, women will face extra burden in times of drought or flood, similar to food insecurity. Women and girls will also have increased stress related to sanitation and hygiene. Women staying in relief camps are at increased risk of sexual violence and/or coercion in return for aid.Finally, increased economic strains on family could lead to a rise in child marriage as families may encourage their daughters to wed in an effort to decrease household costs.

1. Malawi in Figures. 2015. Government of Malawi. ttp://www.nsomalawi.mw/images/stories/data\_on\_line/general/malawi\_in\_figures/Malawi%20in%20Figures%202015.pdf. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. Malawi Demographic and Health Survey. 2010. <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR247/FR247.pdf>. 9. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. Integrated Household Survey. 2010-2011. Republic of Malawi. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLSMS/Resources/3358986-1233781970982/5800988-1271185595871/IHS3_Report.pdf>. 8 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. Malawi Demographic and Health Survey: Key Indicators. 2015-16. <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/PR73/PR73.pdf>. 20. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. Malawi in Figures. 2015. Government of Malawi. ttp://www.nsomalawi.mw/images/stories/data\_on\_line/general/malawi\_in\_figures/Malawi%20in%20Figures%202015.pdf. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. UNDP Human Development Reports Gender Inequality Index. 2014. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GII>. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. Malawi Demographic and Health Survey. 2015-16. 13. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. The Global Gender Gap Report. 2016. WEF. 242. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. Malawi Demographic and Health Survey. 2010. 228. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. Ibid. 13. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. Ibid. 31. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. Ibid. 224. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
15. Ibid. 35. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
16. Child Labor and Forced Labor Reports. Malawi. 2015. US Department of Labor. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/malawi>. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
17. Women and Power: Representation and Influence in Malawi’s Parliament. 2015. ODI Report. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/10289.pdf>. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
18. Social Institutions and Gender Index. Malawi. 2014. <http://www.genderindex.org/country/malawi>. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
19. Malawi Demographic and Health Survey. 2010. 242. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
20. Ibid. 246. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
21. Ibid. 76. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
22. Malawi Demographic and Health Survey. 2015-16: Key Indicators. <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/PR73/PR73.pdf>. 14. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
23. Malawi Demographic and Health Survey. 2010. 40. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)