



Human Rights Report Card

The Status of Rights in the
Bill of Rights during

2025



FW de Klerk
FOUNDATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every year, the FW de Klerk Foundation assesses the degree to which rights and freedoms in the Bill of Rights are being enjoyed in practice. In doing so, the Foundation also considers how the government is meeting its obligations in terms of section 7(2) of the Constitution to **respect, promote and fulfil the rights** in the Bill of Rights. In addition, the Foundation also considers the foundational values in section 1 of the Constitution and – in particular – adherence to the rule of law and the supremacy of the Constitution, on which all the rights in the Bill of Rights ultimately depend.

South Africa's human-rights picture in 2025 is mixed: Some core rights remain in deep distress, others improved, driven by court rulings, targeted reforms and improving macro-economic conditions. The Report Card records severe pressure on rights to life and security, equality and socio-economic entitlements - largely due to violent crime, Gender Based Violence and Femicide ("GBVF"), failing water and sanitation and governance weaknesses. It also notes improvements in dignity protections, anti-trafficking enforcement, political rights administration and limited economic stabilisation. The Foundation's recommendations focus on structural remedies, practical policing, accountable service delivery and evidence-based social policy.



"SOUTH AFRICA'S HUMAN-RIGHTS PICTURE IN 2025 IS MIXED: SOME CORE RIGHTS REMAIN IN DEEP DISTRESS, OTHERS IMPROVED, DRIVEN BY COURT RULINGS, TARGETED REFORMS AND IMPROVING MACRO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS. THE REPORT CARD RECORDS SEVERE PRESSURE ON RIGHTS TO LIFE AND SECURITY, EQUALITY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENTITLEMENTS - LARGELY DUE TO VIOLENT CRIME, GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AND FEMICIDE ("GBVF"), FAILING WATER AND SANITATION AND GOVERNANCE WEAKNESSES. IT ALSO NOTES IMPROVEMENTS IN DIGNITY PROTECTIONS, ANTI-TRAFFICKING ENFORCEMENT, POLITICAL RIGHTS ADMINISTRATION AND LIMITED ECONOMIC STABILISATION."



BILL OF RIGHTS ASSESSMENT

Evaluating the extent to which the rights and freedoms in the Bill of Rights are being enjoyed in practice is crucial: It enables South Africans (and their leaders) to gauge how well the country is making the Constitution a lived reality for all - highlighting both successes and challenges - and encourages citizens to engage in discussions about important issues.

Methodology

The Human Rights Report Card grades constitutional rights and freedoms entrenched in the Constitution's Bill of Rights on a basis of A = excellent; B = good; C = moderate; D = poor; and E = very bad.

A	B	C	D	E
Excellent	Good	Moderate	Poor	Very bad

The allocation of an "=" sign indicates no change in the right, a "+" sign denotes an expected improvement and a "-" sign indicates a likely deterioration of the right.

+	Improvement
=	No change
-	Deterioration

The grade allocation for each right is determined by examining the grade it received in the previous year and by assessing the impact of the current year's political, economic, legal and social developments on that right. For example, if the right to freedom of expression received a C grade in 2024 and developments in 2025 indicate a decline in the enjoyment of that right, it would be downgraded to a C- grade for 2025. This approach helps readers to understand how various factors positively or negatively affect the realisation of rights. These are not finite measures, but a tool to open discussions about the enjoyment of rights and freedoms in South Africa.

Human Rights Dashboard

Constitution section	Right	2024 Grade	2025 Grade	Change
9	Equality	E=	E=	Very bad. No change.
10	Human Dignity	D-	D+	Poor, but improving.
11	Life	E=	E-	Very bad and deteriorating.
12	Freedom and Security of the Person	E	E=	Very bad. No change.
13	Slavery, Servitude and Forced Labour	C=	C+	Moderate and improving.
14	Privacy	C=	C-	Moderate, but deteriorating.

Constitution section	Right	2024 Grade	2025 Grade	Change
15	Freedom of Religion, Belief and Opinion	Covered in the CRL Rights Report Card, 2025.		
16	Freedom of Expression	C-	C=	Moderate. No change.
17	Assembly, Demonstration, Picket and Petition	A=	A=	Excellent. No change.
18	Freedom of Association	B=	B-	Good, but deteriorating.
19	Political Rights	A-	A=	Excellent. No Change.
20	Citizenship	B+	B-	Good, but deteriorating.
21	Freedom of Movement and Residence	B-	B=	Good. No change.
22	Freedom of Trade, Occupation and Profession	D-	D=	Poor. No change.
23	Labour Relations	B+	B=	Good. No change.
24	Environment	B	B-	Good, but deteriorating.
25	Property	D-	D=	Poor. No change.
26	Housing	C=	C-	Moderate, but deteriorating.
27	Health Care, Food Water and Social Security	E-	E-	Very bad and deteriorating.
28	Children	E	E+	Very bad, but improving.
29	Education	D	D-	Poor and deteriorating.
30	Language and Culture	Covered in the CRL Rights Report Card, 2024.		
31	Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities	Covered in the CRL Rights Report Card, 2024.		
32	Access to Information	C+	C=	Moderate. No change.
33	Just Administrative Action	C=	C+	Moderate and improving.
34	Access to Courts	C	C-	Moderate, but deteriorating.
35	Arrested, Detained and Accused Persons	D=	E	Very bad and deteriorating.

- Five rights improved: Human dignity; Freedom from slavery, servitude and forced labour; Political rights; Just administrative action and Children's rights.
- Six rights remained unchanged: Equality; Assembly, Demonstration, Picket and Petition; Freedom of Trade, Occupation and Profession; Property; Freedom of Movement and Residence; and Access to Information.
- Eleven rights deteriorated: Life; Freedom and Security of the Person; Privacy; Freedom of Association; Citizenship; Environment; Housing; Health Care, Food, Water and Social Security; Education; Access to Courts; and Arrested, Detained and Accused Persons.

TOP 10 RIGHTS THREATENED IN 2025



1. The Right to Life (section 11): E-

Murder fell, but lethal and serious violent crime stayed widespread. Policing faces backlogs and integrity challenges.

2. Freedom and Security of the Person (section 12): E=

Serious violent crime, approximately 670 deaths as a result of police action and the Independent Police Investigative Directorate backlogs, left people vulnerable to violence from both state and non-state actors.

3. Health Care, Food, Water and Social Security (section 27): E-

Water and wastewater systems failed at scale; ambulance shortages and oncology backlogs exposed patients to grave risk and grant-system fragility undermined these core rights. Courts repeatedly enforced minimum standards.

4. Children (section 28): E+

There were some court wins, but child hunger, unsafe schools and transport failures keep children in danger.

5. Equality (section 9): E=

Deep and morally indefensible racial disparities in top management persist, while the new numerical targets risk shifting from targets to quotas and the continued rise of gender-based violence (made worse by gaps in sex-disaggregated data) further undermine women's equal enjoyment of their rights.

6. Education (section 29): D-

A record matric pass rate co-exists with a severe early-grade reading crisis, infrastructure and transport gaps and teacher shortages. Many learners still lack safe facilities and reliable transport. All of this weakened learning quality in 2025.



7. Rights of Arrested, Detained and Accused Persons (section 35): E

Poor detention conditions, overcrowding, remand backlogs and constrained legal aid degrade protections.



8. Environment (section 24): C-

Unsafe drinking water, sewage spills and pollution require court-driven enforcement and sustained remediation.

9. Freedom of Trade, Occupation and Profession (section 22): D=

High unemployment, health-sector uncertainty and regulatory friction limit access to work and professional practice.



10. Property (section 25): D=

Litigation and policy debates over expropriation, including "nil compensation", sustained uncertainty and property right risks.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE FW DE KLERK FOUNDATION

Crime and Policing

1. Create a single, real-time crime data platform linking the police, the national prosecuting authority, forensics and intelligence with weekly, leadership-led reviews to steer intelligence-driven operations.
2. Target the small number of hotspots that drive most killings and align deployments to intelligence.
3. Declare gang violence a national disaster to enable a coordinated national response, unlock emergency resources and prioritise intervention.
4. Cut the Independent Police Investigating Directorate's ("IPID") backlog through a time-bound, resourced plan with quarterly provincial progress reports to Parliament. Link station-commanders' performance reviews to IPID cooperation.



Equality and Employment Equity

1. Shift from rigid numerical targets to removing structural barriers to participation (notably spatial segregation and safety).
2. Ensure procurement compliance does not become *de facto* quotas.
3. Focus on fair access and merit.



Youth Unemployment and Work

1. Expand Technical and Vocational Education and Training ("TVET") and link it to paid apprenticeships and internships.
2. Offer firms tax credits for hiring people under 30.
3. Merge fragmented youth employment programmes into one vehicle with clear performance targets.
4. Double funding for youth mental health services and add school-based counselling.
5. Roll out rental subsidies, or low deposit loan guarantees, to help young workers move to where jobs are.
6. Create a youth venture capital fund with public private matching.
7. Pilot income linked education bonds.
8. Deregulate micro-enterprise zones in township areas to allow young people to start businesses with fewer compliance burdens, encouraging formalisation and job creation.
9. Protect and grow youth jobs by diversifying exports through the African Continental Free Trade Area, Asia and the Middle East - while investing in infrastructure and competitiveness.
10. Invest in long-term initiatives that will provide the youth with viable career pathways, not only in trade and industry, but also in emerging sectors such as technology, green energy and innovation.
11. Align education to economic demands.



Coalition Governments

1. Stabilise coalition governments by requiring public, binding and enforceable coalition agreements.

Labour Exploitation

1. Create permanent mobile labour-inspection teams for unannounced, intelligence-led inspections, with immediate compliance orders and criminal referrals.
2. Publish a public “*Prohibited Employers Register*” to bar repeat offenders from public procurement and public credit until remedies are made.

Property and Land Reform

1. Reject nil-compensation and state custodianship proposals.
2. Adopt land reform that expands ownership via title deeds.
3. Shift to individual ownership and an aggregator model, with an urbanisation plan and land release to match demand.

Housing and Urban Reform

1. Address spatial segregation by focussing on urban affordable housing.
2. Establish a public-land, revenue-sharing finance model to deliver mixed-income, affordable housing at scale, learning from Türkiye’s TOKİ.
3. Launch a public-land, revenue-sharing model to deliver mixed-income affordable housing at scale, paired with urban-renewal powers.
4. Municipalities should ringfence the Integrated Urban Development Grant and drive Public Private Partnerships that bundle serviced land with delivery.
5. Pilot a targeted affordable-rental tax credit tied to location and duration of affordability.



Education

1. Embed basic media literacy across all grades.
2. Focus on Early Childhood Development (“ECD”) and early learning foundations, such as reading and numeracy.
3. Improve learner tracking.
4. Support learner well-being with school meals.
5. Focus on making schools safe.

Support the Foundation

The Foundation is a non-profit organisation (NPO number: NPO 031-061) with a small operating budget. **Support our work by making a donation or leaving a bequest.**

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