

WOMEN IN MINING IN SOUTH AFRICA

Fact sheet

March 2020



MINERALS COUNCIL
SOUTH AFRICA



Vedanta Zinc International - Black Mountain Mining

Women working in the mining industry should have the same opportunities open to them as men, and must be safe to pursue them.

Women in the South African mining industry face a range of challenges - some shared by their male counterparts and many that are theirs alone. The Minerals Council and its member companies work to ensure that women working in the industry have the same opportunities open to them as men - and that they are safe to pursue them.

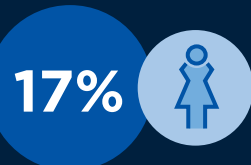
OVERVIEW

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has had a convention in place since 1935 prohibiting the employment of women in underground mining work. However, many countries that initially ratified the convention have since denounced it, including Australia (1988), Canada (1978), Chile (1997) and South Africa (1996). These countries are now largely signatories to the ILO's Convention 176 (Safety and Health in Mines, 1995), which covers the rights of all workers.

Convention 176 states, "Contrary to the old approach based on the outright prohibition of underground work for all female workers, modern standards focus on risk assessment and risk management, and provide for sufficient preventive and protective measures for mineworkers, irrespective of gender, whether employed in surface or underground sites".

South African women played a key role above-ground mining positions long before they were legally allowed to work underground from 1996 onwards. As women have gradually become formal participants in all aspects of the industry's work, they have come up against a range of challenges and restrictions. Over the years, the industry has become better at identifying and dealing with these issues, so creating the conditions for more women to work underground.

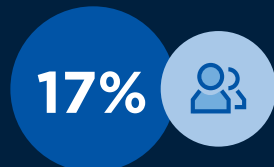
QUICK FACTS 2019



17%



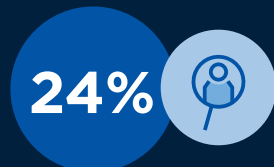
Top management



17%



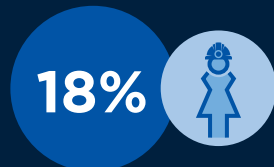
Senior management



24%



Professionally qualified



18%



Skilled technical professions

THE NUMBERS



The number of women working in the mining sector has increased significantly over the years – from around 11,400 in 2002 to 56,691 in 2019. Women represent 12% of South Africa’s total mining labour force of 454,861 people.

Women in mining by commodity in 2019

	No of women employees	% of women employees
PGMs	19,694	12
Gold	11,271	12
Coal	13,059	14
Chrome	3,387	17
Iron ore	2,916	15
Diamond	2,229	15
Cement, lime aggregates and sand	1,385	14
Manganese	1,713	16
Other minerals	1,037	17



Ivanplats – Mokopane

Source: Department of Mineral Resources and Energy
 Note: These figures are Minerals Council estimates for 2019

THE CHALLENGES

Safety

One of the biggest concerns facing women who want to work underground is safety – specifically the risk of sexual harassment, and even sexual violence, directed at them by their male colleagues and by illegal miners.

Underground conditions mean that women are often especially vulnerable. Crowded conveyances, poorly lit tunnels and work areas, the lack of toilet and changing facilities, and the fact that there are very few other women working near them, all make working underground more difficult for women.

Almost daily, women across the industry report incidents of physical assault, verbal abuse, being asked to trade sexual favours for employment or other benefits, or being placed in more junior positions with less pay than their male counterparts. There have also been incidents of rape.

Part of the problem is the patriarchal and sexist culture that exists in South African society, and which is widely prevalent in the mining industry.

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Physical limitations

In the gold and platinum industries especially, South Africa has some of the deepest mines in the world. These mines are historically labour-intensive, requiring physically arduous work under challenging conditions. In general terms, most women do not have the same levels of physical strength as most men – and this has a material impact on their ability to undertake underground work effectively.

Working conditions can further complicate this issue. In situations where women's toilet facilities are situated far away from places of work, women may refrain from drinking while on shift, resulting in dehydration – a dangerous safety risk.

The fact that almost every woman who is physically able to work underground is of child-bearing age also has implications for their work. No pregnant woman may work underground, and the mine is obligated to provide safe above-ground work during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Equipment

A significant challenge to women in the industry is the fact that equipment, including overalls, personal protective equipment (PPE), boots and tools, has historically been designed and manufactured with men in mind. This means that overalls usually cannot be adjusted easily and women need to undress completely to use toilet facilities. Boots are also often too wide and long, gloves are too loose, and tools are designed for larger hands and weight-lifting capabilities.

MAKING WORKING IN MINING MORE ATTRACTIVE FOR WOMEN

Addressing safety

Changes that have been made to enable women to feel safe when working underground include improving lighting; providing safe toilet, shower and changing facilities; and (in some instances) ensuring that women have work buddies who make sure they do not have to move around quiet areas on their own. The industry also acknowledges that the best way to ensure women's safety at work is to change the mindset of their male colleagues and this is an abiding priority.

Adapting equipment

Ensuring that PPE and work clothing fits properly, and is fit for purpose, is key to allowing female employees to be fully and safely active in their jobs. Over the past few years, female employees, unions, management, the Minerals Council and equipment manufacturers have put considerable time into identifying aspects of equipment that need to change in order to be work-appropriate for women. These include the cut and sizing of overalls; the size and fit of helmets, goggles and earplugs; and the sizing and proportions of boots and gloves.

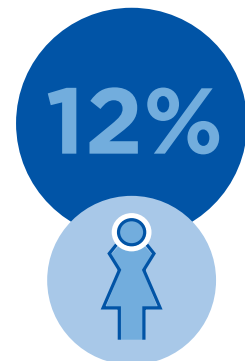
The impact of modernisation – women and the future of mining

As the mining industry – in South Africa and globally – moves into the future, it is increasingly clear that the move to modernisation is critical. As mining becomes more mechanised, physical strength and stamina will become less important than fine motor skills, dexterity and problem-solving abilities. This shift will create significant opportunities for women in the industry.

WHITE PAPER ON WOMEN IN MINING

The Minerals Council has developed a white paper focused on streamlining industry strategies to advance women in mining. It aims to do this by encouraging female representation in the industry and to drive decisions that are in the best interest of women.

The best way to ensure women's safety at work is to change the mindset of their male colleagues.



WOMEN

now represent over 12% of people in the mining industry



Sibanye-Stillwater – Northwest Platinum Operations

The white paper recognises that women in mining is situated within the wider context of gender mainstreaming and diversity management, which includes LGBTQI+ forms of gender identification. Initially, however, activities will focus on women in mining and will include:

- Promoting gender diversity and inclusion at all levels
- Helping women to attain their full potential and to close the gender pay gap
- Developing policies and programmes that advance and protect women, including policies on gender-based violence, sexual harassment and alternative placements during pregnancy
- Adapting workplaces to accommodate women, including ablution facilities, lockable toilets, changing rooms, and childcare and lactation rooms
- Improving safety measures
- Recognising and adjusting for the different physical capacities of women

These activities will be run through the following projects and initiatives:

- Diversity and inclusion programmes that include men
- The development of industry guidelines for women in mining
- The inclusion of women in mining KPIs in senior management performance plans
- Job shadowing, training, recruitment, retention, talent pools and succession planning
- The review and adaptation of workplaces to ensure that the needs of women are met
- The review of physical work capacity requirements in line with the capabilities of women
- Collaborations with relevant partners that advance the cause of women in mining

The Minerals Council will develop a women in mining task team from within the Minerals Council and its member companies that will oversee the implementation of the white paper as well as its monitoring and evaluation.

The Minerals Council white paper on women in mining aims to encourage female representation in the industry and drive decisions that are in the best interests of women.



Northam – Zondereinde laboratory

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CONTACT DETAILS

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