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**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI  
FOR THE 53<sup>RD</sup> SESSION OF THE  
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

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## Status of Human Rights in Eswatini for the 53<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Universal Periodic Review

### Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is an international, non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in the Kingdom of Eswatini (Eswatini) for the 53<sup>rd</sup> session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

### Background

2. Eswatini is a country located in southern Africa and has a population of approximately 1.2 million people.<sup>1</sup> The population is predominantly Christian, with approximately 87.4% of the population identifying as Christian, 10.2% belonging to ethnic religions, and 1.2% identifying as agnostic.<sup>2</sup>

3. Eswatini's last review was held on November 8, 2021.<sup>3</sup> As a result of the review, Eswatini received 222 recommendations, 156 of which it accepted.<sup>4</sup> It was recommended by Kenya, and supported by Eswatini, that the government “[c]ontinue to ensure the full protection of young girls against harmful practices and forced marriages.”<sup>5</sup> It was also recommended by Tanzania, and supported by Eswatini, that the government “[c]ontinue its efforts to ensure the protection of persons with albinism, including by ensuring they have access to education and medical services.”<sup>6</sup> In our last report on Eswatini, we also expressed concern over the practice of underage marriages as well as the discrimination against people with albinism.

### Legal Framework

#### *Underage Marriages*

4. Under Article 27 of the Constitution of Eswatini, “[m]en and women of marriageable age have a right to marry and found a family. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full

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<sup>1</sup> *Eswatini*, BRITANNICA (Oct. 22, 2025), <https://www.britannica.com/place/Eswatini>.

<sup>2</sup> *Swaziland: Major World Religions (1900-2050)*(*World Religion Database, 2025*), THE ASSOCIATION OF RELIGION DATA ARCHIVES, <https://www.thearda.com/world-religion/national-profiles?u=214c>.

<sup>3</sup> *Universal Periodic Review – Eswatini*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/sz-index> (last visited March 25, 2026).

<sup>4</sup> *Infographic-Eswatini*, OHCHR, [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/202205/UPR39\\_Eswatini\\_infographic.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/202205/UPR39_Eswatini_infographic.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> UPR of Eswatini (3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle – 39<sup>th</sup> Session) Thematic List of Recommendations, OHCHR, [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/202-05/UPR39\\_Eswatini\\_Thematic\\_List\\_of\\_Recommendations.docx](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/202-05/UPR39_Eswatini_Thematic_List_of_Recommendations.docx) (last visited March 25, 2026).

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

consent of the intending spouses. The family is the natural and fundamental unit of society and is entitled to protection by the State.”<sup>7</sup>

5. Further, the Marriage Act, 1964, establishes sixteen as the minimum age for girls and eighteen as the minimum age for boys to be married.<sup>8</sup>

6. Eswatini is a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).<sup>9</sup> Under Article 16 of the CEDAW:

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

(a) The same right to enter into marriage;

(b) The same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent;

(c) The same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Exploitation of People with Albinism*

7. Under Article 15 of the Child Protection and Welfare Act, 2012:

A child has a right to refuse to be compelled to undergo or uphold any custom or practices that are likely to negatively affect the child’s life, health, welfare, dignity or physical, emotional, psychological, mental and intellectual development.<sup>11</sup>

8. Further, under Article 14 of the same Act:

(1) A child has a right to be protected from torture or other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment including any cultural practice which dehumanises or is injurious to the physical, psychological, emotional and mental well-being of a child.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> CONS’T OF ESWATINI [SZ][CONSTITUTION] 2005, art. 27, (Estn.)

<sup>8</sup> THE MARRIAGE ACT 1964, PART II, art. 3, (Estn.)

<sup>9</sup> *Ratification Status for Eswatini*, OHCHR,

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=167&Lang=EN](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=167&Lang=EN) (last visited March 25, 2026).

<sup>10</sup> Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women art. 16, *adopted* Mar. 26, 2004, 1249 U.N.T.S. 13, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women> [hereinafter CEDAW].

<sup>11</sup> CHILD PROTECTION AND WELFARE ACT 2012, art. 15, (Estn.)

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* art. 14.

9. Additionally, Eswatini is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).<sup>13</sup> Under Article 6 of the ICCPR, “[e]very human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.”<sup>14</sup>

### Underage Marriage

10. It is estimated that globally, more than 650 million women and girls were married before they turned eighteen.<sup>15</sup> Nearly 50 million of these girls live in countries in Eastern and Southern Africa, where Eswatini is located.<sup>16</sup> In this region, 32% of girls are married before they turn eighteen.<sup>17</sup>

11. Child marriage compromises the development of the child and can have negative long-lasting impacts.<sup>18</sup> For girls, child marriage has been shown to result in early pregnancy, social isolation, dropping out of school, and a higher likelihood to be subjected to domestic violence.<sup>19</sup> Because of the harm that child marriages have on young girls, child marriage has been addressed in the CEDAW, which states in Article 16 that “[t]he betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect.”<sup>20</sup>

12. In 2022, an amendment was proposed to the Marriage Act that would raise the minimum age for girls to be married to eighteen.<sup>21</sup> However, even though this amendment has yet to be passed, Eswatini has done an excellent job combating underage marriages and has one of the lowest rates of child marriage in the region.<sup>22</sup> Currently, in Eswatini, 2% of girls are married before they turn eighteen, and it has been trending downward since the rate was 12.7% in 1997.<sup>23</sup> Not only is that a significant improvement since 1997, it is also an improvement since Eswatini’s last UPR. In our last report, we noted that 5% of girls in Eswatini were married before they turned eighteen. This means that rate has dropped by 3% just since its last review.

13. To further address child marriage, in 2023, the government implemented the National Plan of Action for Children in Eswatini 2023-2027.<sup>24</sup> Part of the purpose of this new plan of action is to review legislation and strengthen child protection in various areas, including child

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<sup>13</sup> *Ratification Status for Eswatini*, *supra* note 9.

<sup>14</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 6, *adopted* Mar. 26, 2004, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>.

<sup>15</sup> *Child Marriage in Eastern and Southern Africa*, UNICEF (Jun 16, 2022), <https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-in-eastern-and-southern-africa-a-statistical-overview-and-reflections-on-ending-the-practice/>.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> *Child Marriage is a Violation of Human Rights, but is All too Common*, UNICEF.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> CEDAW art. 16, *supra* note 10.

<sup>21</sup> *An Opportunity for Law Reform on Child Marriages in Eswatini*, S. AFR. LITIG. CTR. (2022), [https://www.southernafricalitigationcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/SALC-policy-brief\\_-an-opportunity-for-law-reform-on-child-marriages-in-Eswatini.pdf](https://www.southernafricalitigationcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/SALC-policy-brief_-an-opportunity-for-law-reform-on-child-marriages-in-Eswatini.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> *Eswatini*, THE CHILD MARRIAGE DATA PORTAL, <https://childmarriedata.org/country-profiles/eswatini/>.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> *National Plan of Action for Children in Eswatini, Kingdom of Eswatini* (2023), THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI: DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER'S OFF.: NAT'L CHILD. SERV. DEP'T (Jan. 2023), [https://www.unicef.org/eswatini/media/1721/file/Eswatini\\_National\\_Plan\\_of\\_Action\\_for\\_Children\\_2023.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/eswatini/media/1721/file/Eswatini_National_Plan_of_Action_for_Children_2023.pdf).

marriage.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, Eswatini has committed to eliminating child marriages by 2030, which they just may achieve if they continue their current path.<sup>26</sup>

### Exploitation of People with Albinism

14. Albinism is a genetic condition that results in the production of little to no melanin in the skin, hair, and eyes, and is not contagious,<sup>27</sup> nor does it typically impact the lifespan of the individual.<sup>28</sup> Across Africa, and in Eswatini, people with albinism are at risk of suffering ritual abuse and attacks because of their condition.<sup>29</sup> In many regions in Sub-Saharan Africa, traditional African healing and religious beliefs and practices are deeply engrained in society.<sup>30</sup> Part of these beliefs is the notion that body parts of people with albinism can be used to ward off ancestral wrath, cure impotency, and generate wealth.<sup>31</sup> As a result, across Africa and Eswatini, people with albinism are at risk of suffering ritual abuse, physical and psychological violence, torture, mutilation, and, in some cases, murder.<sup>32</sup> Sadly, in Eswatini, there is also the belief that these body parts can help people win elections.<sup>33</sup>

15. For example, in the lead-up to the 2023 general election in Eswatini, there were three recorded cases of attempted kidnapping of people with albinism.<sup>34</sup> Philemon Gama, the President of the Persons With Albinism organization in Eswatini urged individuals with albinism to move and seek safety with their relatives until after the elections.<sup>35</sup> Further, King Mswati III came out strongly against attacking people with albinism and warned that this harmful belief in no way impacts the outcomes of elections.<sup>36</sup>

16. In addition to being targeted as a result of traditional beliefs, people with albinism are also discriminated against in their community.<sup>37</sup> These individuals have reported facing verbal abuse, ostracization, and discrimination in the education and healthcare sectors.<sup>38</sup> There have also been cases where a woman who gives birth to a child with albinism is scolded by her husband and is

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<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

<sup>26</sup> *Eswatini*, GIRLS NOT BRIDES, <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/eswatini/>.

<sup>27</sup> Khaya Simelane, *Cultural Leadership Confronts Albinism Discrimination Head-On*, TIMES OF ESWATINI (Feb. 18, 2026).

<sup>28</sup> *Albinism: Types, Symptoms and Causes*, <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/21747-albinism>.

<sup>29</sup> Joan Nyanyuki, *Witch-Hunts and Ritual Child Abuse are a Stain on Africa. We Must Confront Them*, THE GUARDIAN (June 8, 2022).

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

<sup>33</sup> *Swaziland Newsletter No. 798-22 September 2023*, SWAZI MEDIA COMMENT. (Sep. 22, 2023), <https://swazimedia.blogspot.com/2023/09/>.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

<sup>36</sup> *Id.*

<sup>37</sup> Khaya Simelane, *Cultural Leadership Confronts Albinism Discrimination Head – On*, *supra* note 27.

<sup>38</sup> *Id.*

blamed for giving birth to a child with albinism.<sup>39</sup> Further, children with albinism are at risk of being abandoned by their parents because they believe that their condition is a sign of misfortune.<sup>40</sup>

17. During its last UPR, we recommended that Eswatini continue its work to combat the negative beliefs associated with albinism and continue to work to protect these vulnerable individuals. Further, Eswatini also supported a recommendation to “[c]ontinue its efforts to ensure the protection of persons with albinism, including by ensuring they have access to education and medical services.”<sup>41</sup> Since its last UPR, Eswatini has taken numerous steps to continue to protect people with albinism.

18. For example, in 2025, Deputy Prime Minister Thulisile Dladla announced the construction of new houses to provide shelter for people with albinism.<sup>42</sup> This new project would result in the construction of twenty-seven houses in total.<sup>43</sup> When the project was announced, the Deputy Prime Minister urged citizens to combat negative beliefs and stigmas against people with albinism, stating:

We need to ensure that everyone in society is welcome in our communities, especially those who are from marginalised groups. The country has a Constitution that promotes the rights of all people, even our authorities respect the nation, hence I plead with all of you to also respect one another.<sup>44</sup>

19. Additionally, in 2025, the Eswatini Television Authority (ETVA) launched the Albinism Awareness Initiative to promote inclusion, dignity, and empowerment for people with albinism.<sup>45</sup> Further, that same year, the Ministry of Tourism and Environmental Affairs launched the “Safe Skin, Bright Future” campaign to provide sun protection kits for people with albinism.<sup>46</sup> This campaign focuses on protecting the health of people with albinism by providing them with kits to protect their skin from the harmful effects of ultraviolet radiation.<sup>47</sup>

## Recommendations

20. As shown by Eswatini’s declining rates of child marriage, Eswatini has done a great job combatting child marriage. We want to encourage Eswatini to continue the work it has done to bring down rates of child marriage. Eswatini is an example to other countries in the region about what can be accomplished if they take child marriage seriously. We want to encourage Eswatini

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<sup>39</sup> *People with Albinism Face Multiple Forms of Discrimination Worldwide*, PEOPLE WITH ALBINISM: NOT GHOSTS BUT HUM. BEINGS, <https://albinism.ohchr.org/human-rights-dimension-of-albinism.html?utm>.

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

<sup>41</sup> UPR of Eswatini (3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle – 39<sup>th</sup> Session) Thematic List of Recommendations, *supra* note 5.

<sup>42</sup> Bongumusa Simelane & Mfanzile Shongwe, *DPM to Construct Houses for People with Albinism*, ESWATINI OBSERVER (June 19, 2025), <https://eswatiniobserver.com/dpm-to-construct-houses-for-people-with-albinism/>.

<sup>43</sup> *Id.*

<sup>44</sup> *Id.*

<sup>45</sup> *ETVA Launches Powerful Initiative for Albinism Inclusion*, AFR. PRESS (July 12, 2025), <https://www.africa-press.net/eswatini/all-news/etva-launches-powerful-initiative-for-albinism-inclusion>.

<sup>46</sup> *Safe Skin Bright Future Campaign Launched for Albinism Support*, AFR. PRESS (July 5, 2025), <https://www.africa-press.net/eswatini/all-news/safe-skin-bright-future-campaign-launched-for-albinism-support>.

<sup>47</sup> *Id.*

to be an example to other countries in the region and continue working to fully eradicate child marriage.

21. Additionally, we urge Eswatini to continue its commitment to protect people with albinism from being discriminated against and attacked. Eswatini has shown a commitment to providing this vulnerable population with shelters and medical equipment. Further, because people with albinism are targeted due to stigma, stereotypes, and erroneous and harmful religious beliefs, it is important the government continue to combat these myths by raising awareness and educating the population, and the King should continue making public statements on the same.