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Poverty & Equity Brief

October 2026

ZAMBIA

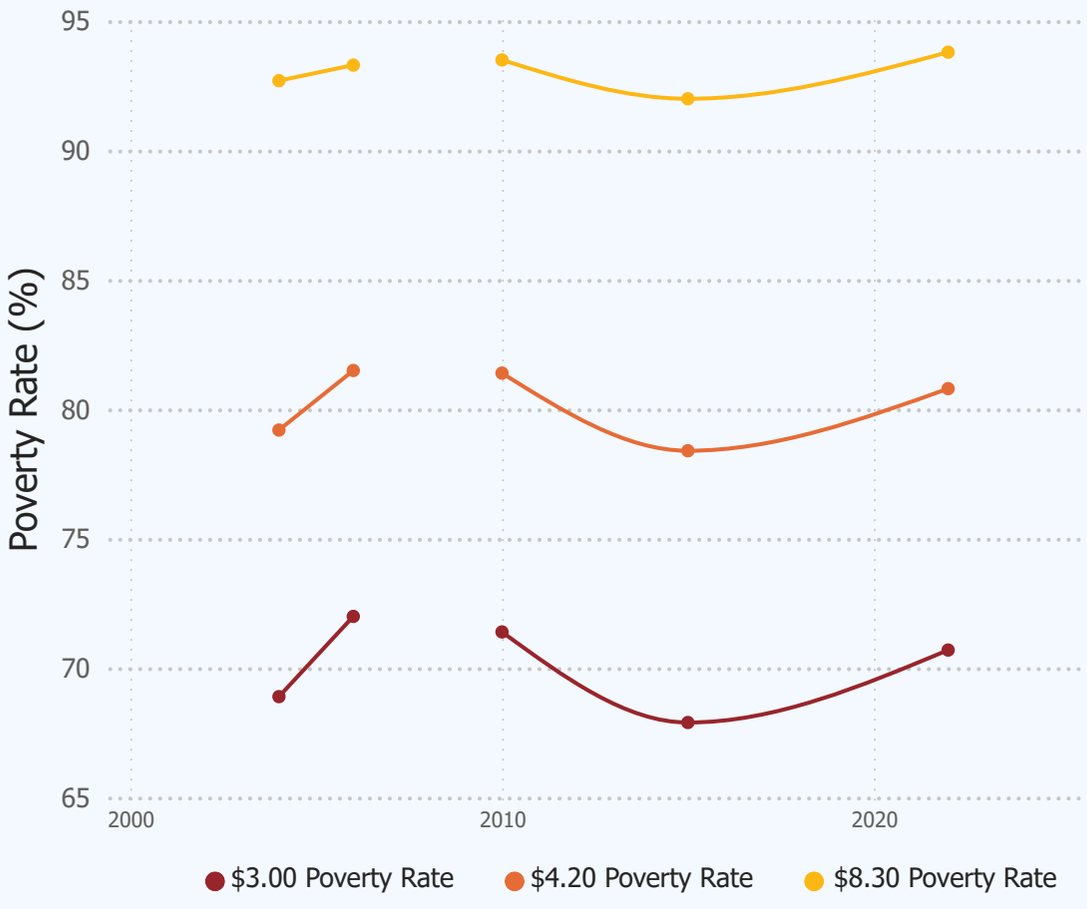
In 2022, 60 percent of Zambia's population lived below the national poverty line, with poverty reaching 78.8 percent in rural areas and 31.9 percent in urban areas. Rural poverty reflects the continued prevalence of low-productivity subsistence agriculture, persistent gaps in access to services and markets, and recurrent exposure to climate shocks. But poverty is no longer only a rural story: urban poverty rose by 8.5 percentage points between 2015 and 2022, with evidence suggesting that the deterioration extended beyond the temporary effects of the shocks experienced around 2020. High inequality compounds these challenges. The Gini index remains above the World Bank's high-inequality threshold of 40, weakening the transmission of economic growth into poverty reduction and leaving poverty disproportionately high for Zambia's level of GDP per capita.

Recent macroeconomic developments have become more favorable, supported by improved rainfall, a rebound in agriculture, more stable electricity supply, and gains across services and industry. However, labor market improvements have been slower and less evenly distributed. National unemployment declined gradually between 2020 and 2023 before rising again in 2024. Both the earlier gains and subsequent reversal were driven largely by rural areas, while urban labor market conditions showed little improvement. Outcomes also varied markedly across provinces: unemployment remained comparatively low in Lusaka but rose steadily in Copperbelt and remained elevated in North-Western, underscoring the uneven distribution of labor market gains across the country. Combined with rapid growth in the working-age population, these trends highlight the challenge of creating productive jobs at a pace sufficient to improve household welfare and reduce poverty.

The resulting disconnect between economic growth, productive job creation, and household welfare remains a central constraint to faster poverty reduction. At the same time, faster poverty reduction will require stronger growth than Zambia has achieved in recent years. Even under the BAU scenario, growth remains too low in per capita terms to make a meaningful difference to poverty, which is expected to decline by only about 1 percentage point over the next two years. A potential El Niño-related drought remains an important downside risk. Southern, Western, and Central Provinces are expected to face the highest risk of below-normal rainfall, which could reduce rural incomes, raise food prices, constrain electricity supply, and worsen food insecurity among vulnerable households. Nevertheless, Zambia enters the 2026/27 agricultural season far better prepared than ahead of the 2023/24 drought, with a bumper harvest, improved water storage, stronger shock-response systems, and access to pre-arranged crisis financing, suggesting a less severe food-security shock than experienced during the previous drought.

$3.00 Poverty Rate	$8.30 Poverty Rate	Gini Index	Prosperity Gap
2022	2022	2022	2022
70.7%	93.8%	51.8	22.5

Poverty Rate



Inequality

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Poverty at Different Lines

Poverty Line	Number of Poor (Thousands)	Rate (%)	Year
National Poverty Line	11,766.5	60.0	2022
International Poverty Line ($3.00/day)	14,253.8	70.7	2022
Lower Middle Income Class Poverty Line ($4.20/day)	16,278.9	80.8	2022
Upper Middle Income Class Poverty Line ($8.30/day)	18,905.5	93.8	2022
Multidimensional Poverty Measure		72.7	2022

Group and Multidimensional Poverty

Poverty by Group	Poverty Rate (%)
Urban population	47.0
Rural population	88.1
Males	71.5
Females	71.8
0 to 14 years old	77.4
15 to 64 years old	67.7
65 and older	72.0
Without education (16+)	83.8
Primary education (16+)	87.5
Secondary education (16+)	65.3
Tertiary/post-secondary education (16+)	9.4

Multidimensional Poverty Components	(% of Pop.)
Daily income less than US$3.00 per person	71.6
At least one school-aged child is not enrolled in school	23.4
No adult has completed primary education	9.7
No access to limited-standard drinking water	26.8
No access to limited-standard sanitation	53.5
No access to electricity	45.1

Note:
N/A denotes a missing/removed value, while N/A* refers to a value which was removed due to having fewer than 30 observations.
The rates in the Poverty by Group table above are shown at the $3.00 international line.
Data for the Poverty by Group table is derived from a 2022 survey and data for the Multidimensional Poverty Components table is derived from a 2022 survey.

Poverty Data & Methodology

Poverty and inequality estimates are based on the 2022 Living Conditions Monitoring Survey (LCMS) conducted by the Zambia Statistics Agency (ZamStats) and use household consumption as the welfare aggregate. Due to questionnaire design changes, statistical methods were used to derive estimates comparable to the previous survey round in 2015. Both estimates follow the poverty methodology adopted in 2015, including the poverty line, which was re-expressed in 2022 prices using CPI. The poverty line follows the CBN approach and it is anchored in minimum calorie requirements. The composition of the food basket was determined by the National Food and Nutrition Commission and the Price and Income Commission in 1991.

International poverty and inequality estimates rely on the official consumption aggregate, except that welfare is expressed on a per-capita rather than per adult-equivalent basis.

Harmonization

The numbers presented in this brief are based on the SSAPOV database. SSAPOV is a database of harmonized nationally representative household surveys managed by Sub-Saharan Team for Statistical Development. It contains more than 100 surveys covering 45 out of the 48 countries in the SSA region. The three countries not covered in the database are Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, and Somalia. Terms of use of the data adhere to agreements with the original data producers. The poverty rate reported in the MPM differs from that in the main table because households missing all other MPM deprivation indicators are excluded from the MPM calculation, resulting in a different analytic sample.

Africa Eastern & Southern

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