



EQUALITY IN LAW FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS BY 2030: A MULTISTAKEHOLDER STRATEGY FOR ACCELERATED ACTION

PROGRESS REVIEW AND UPDATED TARGETS



EQUALITY IN LAW FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS BY 2030: A MULTISTAKEHOLDER STRATEGY FOR ACCELERATED ACTION

PROGRESS REVIEW AND UPDATED TARGETS

Human Rights and Nondiscrimination Section

UN Women

New York, 2026



INTRODUCTION

Over 2.5 billion women and girls worldwide continue to live under the shadow of discriminatory legal systems that erode their dignity, restrict opportunities, and violate fundamental human rights. Discriminatory laws, whether constitutional, civil, criminal, labour, or administrative, remain one of the most entrenched barriers to gender equality, undermining sustainable development and the realization of human potential.

In response to this challenge, UN Women and a diverse, global coalition of 20 partner organizations launched [Equality in Law for Women and Girls by 2030: A Multistakeholder Strategy for Accelerated Action](#) in 2019. The strategy set a bold vision: to fast-track the repeal of discriminatory laws across six thematic areas in 100 countries, with the aim of impacting the lives of over 50 million women and girls. Its areas of focus were selected through extensive consultation with partners and aim to eliminate legal frameworks that deepen discrimination in employment; marriage and family; sexual violence; age of marriage; and nationality, with an overarching focus on comprehensive reforms. These areas were prioritized because they contain explicit legal provisions that directly discriminate against women and girls, and because they safeguard fundamental rights which serve as gateways to the enjoyment of a wide range of other civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. The strategy builds on existing programmes and partnerships that align with and contribute to the objective of eliminating

discriminatory laws, and optimizes the benefits of sharing platforms, resources and technical expertise, as well as supporting feminist movements, for legal reform.

A review of strategy implementation confirms both progress and persistent challenges. Reform momentum is visible across regions, yet advances remain irregular between thematic areas. A rise in conflict, technology-facilitated violence, and bias against women and girls, as well as a growing backlash to gender equality, make achieving legal equality ever more urgent.

To sustain and accelerate progress, the strategy's targets have therefore been updated to reflect current realities while preserving shared ambition. These updates were informed by extensive consultations with partner organizations, drawing on their expertise, lessons learned from implementation, and analysis of global and regional legal reform trends. This document outlines the progress achieved to date, the recalibrated targets for each priority area, and the next steps required to ensure that equality in law for women and girls can be realized by 2030.

GLOBAL PROGRESS TO DATE

Five years into implementation of *Equality in Law for Women and Girls by 2030*, different metrics show varying results across the priority areas. For example, key aggregate results from UN Women's Strategic Plan reveal that 325 laws across 83 countries globally were adopted, revised, or repealed to advance gender equality and protect the rights of women and girls in line with international norms and standards from 2022-2024. Such reforms, carried out following UN Women collaboration with national partners, impacted the lives of 2.9 billion women and girls, who now live in a more supportive legislative and policy environment.¹ Data from Sustainable Development Goal indicator 5.1.1, measuring whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce, and monitor equality and nondiscrimination on the basis of sex, show that between 2019 and 2024, 99 positive reforms removing discriminatory laws and establishing legal frameworks to advance gender equality were recorded in 47 countries.² Finally, the World Bank Group's *Women, Business and the Law* database reveals that between 2019 and 2024, 296 positive reforms were instituted in 102 economies to increase women's economic empowerment, affecting approximately 1.9 billion women and girls worldwide.³ Indeed, the first five years of the strategy have demonstrated that legal reform is both possible and impactful, with momentum across regions and thematic areas.

Many countries have undertaken reviews of their legal frameworks to remove discriminatory provisions across multiple sectors. In the **Philippines**, for example, a comprehensive legal assessment led to the development of a national action plan to align all laws with constitutional and international equality obligations. **Mongolia** mandated equal remuneration for work of equal value, and **Malawi** introduced paid paternity leave to promote shared caregiving responsibilities. Legislative victories were achieved in **Mozambique**, which closed loopholes allowing child marriage, and **Colombia**, which equalized the marriage age for women and men at 18. Since 2019, six countries have reformed laws to advance women's nationality rights, with three expanding women's right to confer nationality to their children and three upholding comprehensive gender equality in their nationality laws. **Bahrain** repealed provisions allowing rapists to escape prosecution upon marriage to the survivor. In **Uzbekistan**, legal amendments now recognize the equal rights of spouses to marital property, while in **Tunisia**, reforms have bolstered women's ability to initiate divorce on equal terms. These changes represent important steps toward ensuring equality in the legal foundations that shape every sphere of public and private life.

1. UN Women. Global Results Overview. UN Women Transparency Portal. Available at: <https://open.unwomen.org/en/global-results/overview>.

2. United Nations Statistics Division. Sustainable Development Goal 5 – Gender Equality, in *SDG Report 2024*. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/Goal-05/#.~:text=Data%20from%20120%20countries%20show.on%20stopping%20violence%20against%20women>.

3. World Bank. *Women, Business and the Law 2024*. Washington, DC: World Bank. Available at: <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/wbl-data>.

They also illustrate the breadth of progress possible when political will, advocacy, and technical expertise align. Yet despite these gains, the pace of change is uneven, and significant gaps remain across thematic areas and regions. Several targets are unmet, and discriminatory laws continue to limit the rights and opportunities of millions of women and girls. Achieving gender equality in law is not only a

matter of justice, but also a prerequisite for broader social and economic progress. The urgency to act is clear, and this midterm point provides an opportunity to recalibrate the approach. The updated targets outlined in the next section thus reflect both the progress made and the scale of the challenge that remains.



Living Conditions: Family in Bokonbaevo
Photo: © UN Women/Bektur Zhanibekov

UPDATED FRAMEWORK AND TARGETS

Achieving equality before the law begins with dismantling discriminatory legal frameworks and ensuring that justice systems guarantee women's rights in practice. Following the review, the strategy continues with one overarching, cross-cutting goal and five priority thematic areas. The thematic areas have been updated to respond to current global trends in legal reform, in line with international instruments and modern jurisprudence (see Table 1).

COMPREHENSIVE REFORMS

This overarching, cross-cutting goal reframes the original thematic area on “comprehensive reforms” as a unifying priority. It reflects the breadth of discrimination embedded in national legal systems and recognizes the role of gender machineries in spearheading comprehensive initiatives, as well as the adoption of national action plans focused on legal equality. As suggested by the strategy, the road to comprehensive reforms includes a thorough analysis of national laws from a gender perspective and blueprints to guide reform processes. Such reforms are supported by wide-ranging country legal assessments and other knowledge products, including the Global Gender Equality Constitutional Database, a repository of gender equality related provisions extracted from 194 constitutions around the world, and the *Women, Business and the Law* database. Research and knowledge sharing work aimed at supporting Members States to draft and pass laws advancing gender equality is also ongoing among partner organizations.

There has been notable progress in overarching reforms since 2019. For example, both **Cuba** and **Guinea** introduced constitutional amendments strengthening women's rights, and **Sierra Leone** passed wide-ranging gender equality legislation. Thus, while the target of this priority theme was originally intended to repeal discriminatory laws that directly and indirectly impact women and girls in 20 countries, it has been updated to reflect the total 100 countries that the strategy aims to reach. Under this new framing, the comprehensive reforms goal may also encompass areas that do not fall neatly within the other thematic categories, including broad anti-discrimination legislation that includes sex or gender and the repeal of constitutional “clawback” provisions that weaken equality guarantees.

PROMOTING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Due to strong reform momentum in recent years and the critical role of economic empowerment in advancing women's autonomy, agency, and well-being, this target has been updated to 25 countries. As stated above, reforms were enacted in 102 economies to increase women's economic opportunity during the first five years of the strategy. **Gabon**, **Jordan**, and **Viet Nam**, for example, removed restrictions on women's employment in specific industries, while **Armenia** protected women from sexual harassment in employment and **Oman** increased paid maternity leave. Raising the target aligns with the strategy's commitment to capitalizing

on existing forward movement, while addressing persistent barriers in pay equity, occupational segregation, and recognition of unpaid care work. This thematic area will also be expanded to include

reforms that strengthen women's access to finance and entrepreneurship, recognizing their central role in enabling economic independence and broader participation in economic life.

ELIMINATING HARMFUL AND DISCRIMINATORY MINIMUM AGE OF MARRIAGE PROVISIONS

Progress has been steady in this area, with at least 10 countries raising or equalizing the marriage age since 2019, including **Finland** (2019), **Indonesia** (2019), and **Zambia** (2023), among others. However, the global prevalence of child marriage remains

high. Retaining the original target of 15 countries reflects the urgency of sustained legislative advocacy in the face of economic, cultural, and pandemic-related setbacks that threaten to reverse gains.



A conversation about issues like prevention of child marriage in Kalibari Village, Dacope Upazilla
Photo: © UNICEF/UNI146627/Shafiqul Alam Kiron.

TABLE 1.**Original and updated targets**

Thematic Area	Original Target	Updated Target
Comprehensive Reforms	Repeal discriminatory laws that directly and indirectly impact women and girls in 20 countries.	Comprehensively reform discriminatory laws that directly or indirectly impact women and girls in 100 countries as a cross-cutting goal.
Promoting Women’s Economic Empowerment	Repeal laws undermining equal pay, recognition of unpaid care work, protection of domestic workers, parental leave, and employment freedom in 15 countries.	Enact laws that expand women’s access to finance and entrepreneurship, ensure equal pay, recognize unpaid care work, protect domestic workers, guarantee parental leave, and secure employment freedom in 25 countries .
Eliminating Harmful and Discriminatory Minimum Age of Marriage Provisions	Promote 18 years as the minimum age of marriage and eliminate related exceptions in 15 countries.	Promote 18 years as the minimum age of marriage, and eliminate all exceptions, in 15 countries .
Ending Gender Discrimination in Nationality Laws	Uphold women’s rights to equality in nationality and citizenship laws in 25 countries.	Uphold women’s rights to equality in nationality and citizenship laws in 25 countries , including the right to confer nationality to both children and spouses.
Addressing Discriminatory Rape Laws	Revise provisions that exempt perpetrators from rape charges if they marry the survivor in 10 countries.	Revise rape laws to align with consent-based definitions and remove provisions that exempt perpetrators from rape charges if they marry the survivor in 20 countries .
Promoting Equality in Family Relations	Repeal gender discriminatory personal status laws related to marriage, divorce, parental rights, and inheritance in 15 countries.	Reform gender discriminatory family and personal status laws related to marriage, divorce, property rights in marriage, parental rights, and inheritance in 15 countries .

ENDING GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN NATIONALITY LAWS

Nationality rights are fundamental to women's status as equal citizens and their equality in the family, as well as an entry to other fundamental rights. Increased and robust engagement is essential as reform remains challenging, with only six countries enacting changes since 2019. This is in large part due to a connection with deeply entrenched patriarchal structures, additional difficulties linked with expanding access to citizenship in an era marked by xenophobia and increasing migration, and a reticence by some actors to engage target governments on what is deemed to be a sensitive issue in some contexts. Laws in over 40 countries still deny women the same rights as men to confer nationality to their children or spouses. These provisions directly undermine women's equality and perpetuate statelessness.

Still, the last five years have seen the adoption of the Arab Declaration on Belonging and Legal Identity (2024), which calls for League of Arab States Member States to end gender discrimination in nationality, and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Specific Aspects of the Right to a Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness in Africa (2024), which also calls for women's equal nationality rights. In addition, countries including **Liberia** and **Malaysia** have enacted reforms upholding women's right to pass citizenship to their children regardless of the child's place of birth or the mother's marital status. Given these factors, in this case maintaining an ambitious target of 25 countries draws renewed

attention to the issue and reinforces the need for sustained advocacy despite perceptions of political sensitivities by some stakeholders.

ADDRESSING DISCRIMINATORY RAPE LAWS

The thematic scope of this area, while previously limited to provisions that exempt perpetrators from rape charges if they marry the survivor, has been broadened to include reform toward consent-based definitions of rape, in line with the Istanbul Convention and evolving international standards. A legal definition of rape or sexual assault should be centered on an individual's voluntary, genuine, and willing consent to participate, and consent must be assessed in the context of the surrounding circumstances. While **Bahrain**, **Kuwait**, and **Thailand** have repealed exemptions from punishment for rapists who subsequently marry the survivor since 2019, most jurisdictions still define rape in ways that fail to protect survivors adequately. In the current global context of backlash, it is equally critical to guard against regression, as evidenced by recent trends to weaken sexual violence legislation. Expanding the target from 10 to 20 countries acknowledges the normative shift toward consent-based legal frameworks and the need for systemic change beyond isolated provisions. More countries are already adopting consent-based rape laws, particularly in Europe and Central Asia. In 2018, for example, **Sweden** defined rape as sexual activity without voluntary, affirmative consent, regardless of whether coercion, violence, or threats were involved.

PROMOTING EQUALITY IN FAMILY RELATIONS

Since 2019, reforms in just 12 countries have advanced equality in marriage, divorce, and inheritance. For example, **Côte d'Ivoire** granted spouses equal rights to immovable property and equal administrative authority over assets during marriage. **Saudi Arabia** began allowing women to be head of household and removed the legal obligation for a married woman to obey her husband. In 2020, **Chile, Portugal, Puerto Rico,** and **Rwanda** abolished a waiting period for women before remarrying. Nevertheless, the family domain remains a space in which women and girls' rights are frequently violated. In particular, reforms related to property and inheritance are often difficult to pass, especially where social norms dictate women and girls' property ownership. The updated framing, while keeping the target of 15 countries the same, thus explicitly incorporates women's property rights within marriage, a critical area often conflated with inheritance and overlooked in reform processes. Legal recognition of women's property rights is essential to ensuring equitable outcomes at the dissolution of marriage, whether by divorce or death of a spouse.

While the strategy's thematic areas target the most persistent forms of explicit legal discrimination, gender equality extends beyond these domains. Issues such as digital rights, climate change, and the effective implementation of laws are increasingly urgent in the current global context. These areas have profound implications for women's safety, participation, and autonomy. However, this strategy remains deliberately focused on securing fundamental legal equality in the identified thematic areas, recognizing that the repeal of discriminatory laws is a necessary foundation upon which broader protections and rights can be built and sustained. By addressing these core legal barriers first, the strategy aims to create the enabling legal environment required for progress across the full spectrum of women and girls' rights.

KEY LESSONS AND CHALLENGES

The review highlights a mixed landscape of achievement and unmet ambition. The most notable gains have been in the area of women’s economic empowerment, where reforms addressing equal pay, labour protections, and occupational access have surpassed expectations. However, progress has been uneven: equal nationality rights, consent-based rape laws, and family and personal status reforms remain the slowest-moving thematic areas, hindered by deeply rooted social norms, political

sensitivities, and in some contexts, legislative inertia or lack of political will. Addressing these issues will require more deliberate integration into legal reform agendas and remains essential to realizing gender equality. The review also underscores persistent data challenges. The absence of a centralized source for tracking global law reforms limits the ability to monitor, compare, and communicate progress effectively.



Historically, the rural area of Manaure has been inhabited by indigenous Wayúu families
Photo: © UNICEF/UN0777063/Guillermo Ossa

NEXT STEPS

Looking ahead, the strategy's success will depend on renewed political commitment, targeted technical support, and stronger mechanisms for coordination with partners and other key stakeholders at the national, regional, and global levels. Recommitment to the updated targets, particularly by the intergovernmental and multilateral organizations that form the backbone of this strategy, will be essential to sustain momentum and mobilize the political will needed to close persistent gaps. The strength of the partners lies in their ability to convene high-level actors and set the agenda for transformative legal reform, and this midpoint provides an opportunity to reaffirm that leadership while welcoming any additional partners whose expertise can help advance the overarching goal. Supporting national legal reform strategies will require deepened engagement with gender machineries, peer-to-peer exchanges among lawmakers and advocates, feminist movement building, and targeted capacity-building to translate reform commitments into enacted laws. Improved monitoring and reporting will be critical for tracking both reforms and their reach.

While the strategy will continue to focus on achieving formal legal equality, there is scope to complement this approach with measures that assess women and

girls' substantive enjoyment of their rights, ensuring that legal change delivers tangible benefits. Partners will continue to execute the strategy collectively, working together on an internal implementation plan that identifies the lead agency for each thematic area, amplifies accelerators, and clarifies procedures for developing and maintaining a repository of legal reforms. Regular liaising among partners will ensure shared accountability and the ability to respond swiftly to emerging opportunities and challenges. By pursuing these priorities in concert, partners can close remaining gaps and ensure that the vision of equality before the law becomes a lived reality for women and girls everywhere.

This review underscores both the transformative potential of coordinated legal reform and the urgency of sustained action. More information on this work is available in the full strategy, including details on current partner organizations, relevant data and indicators, implementation accelerators, and other elements that underpin this collective approach. Achieving equality before the law for every woman and girl by 2030 demands political will, technical expertise, and collective commitment. With revised targets, clearer priorities, and renewed momentum, our partnership can deliver on this vision.

STEERING COMMITTEE OF EQUALITY IN LAW FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS BY 2030

UN Women; The African Union; Commonwealth Secretariat; Inter-Parliamentary Union; Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie; Secretaria General Ibero-Americana; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; Equality Now; Global Citizen; Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights; Global Campaign for Equality in Family Law; International Association of Women Judges; International Development Law Organization; Muslims for Progressive Values; Women's Learning Partnership; The International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute; Commonwealth Parliamentary Association; Girls Not Brides; and the World Bank.



UN WOMEN EXISTS TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S RIGHTS, GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS.

As the lead UN entity on gender equality and secretariat of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, we shift laws, institutions, social behaviours and services to close the gender gap and build an equal world for all women and girls. Our partnerships with governments, women's movements and the private sector coupled with our coordination of the broader United Nations translate progress into lasting changes. We make strides forward for women and girls in four areas: leadership, economic empowerment, freedom from violence, and women, peace and security as well as humanitarian action.

UN Women keeps the rights of women and girls at the centre of global progress – always, everywhere. Because gender equality is not just what we do. It is who we are.



220 E 42nd St
New York, NY 10017

country.unwomen.org
facebook.com/unwomencountry.com/
country.unwomen.org
instagram.com/unwomencountry