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# WORDS

# & DEEDS

## BEIJING +30

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

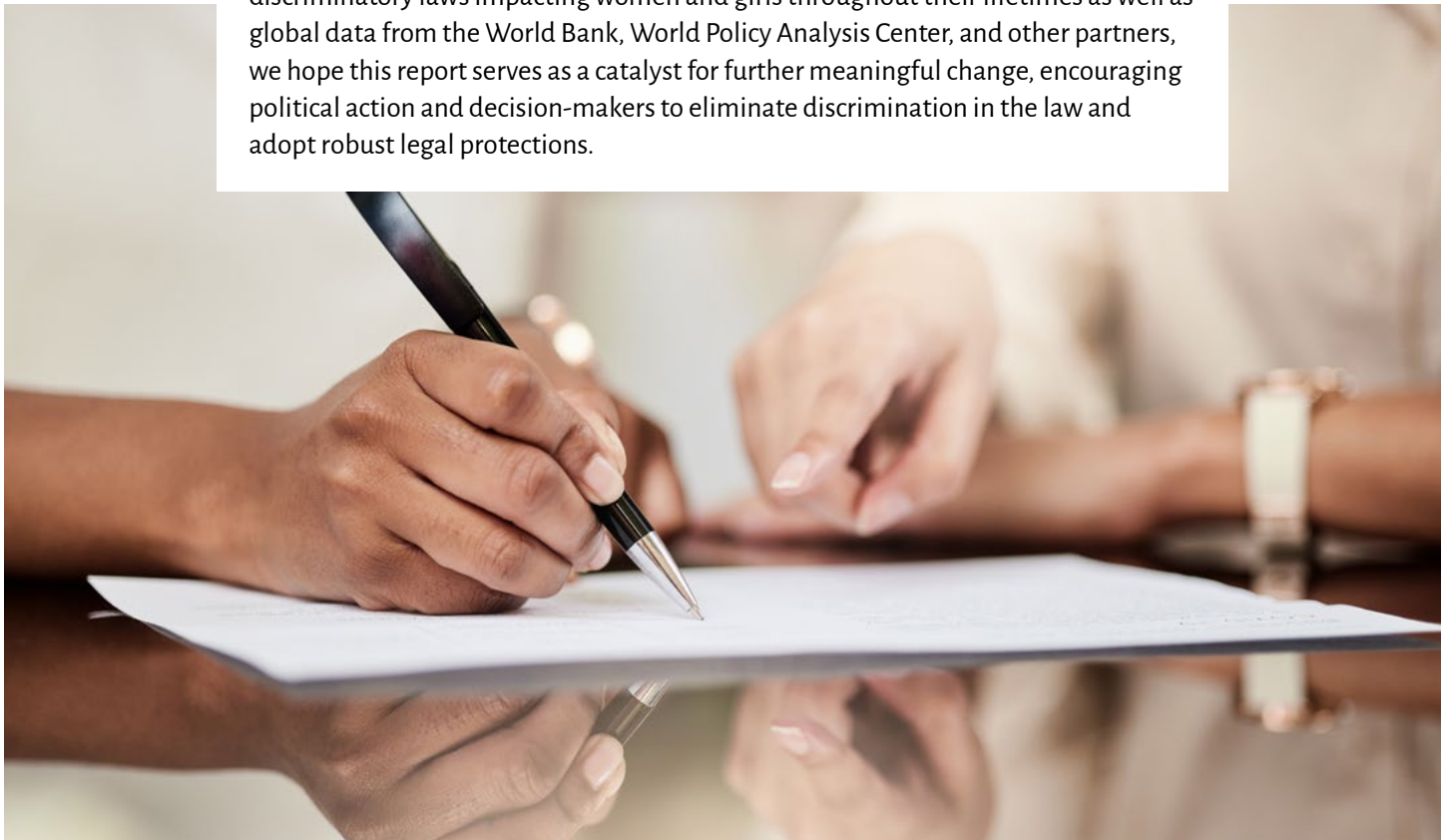
### Thirtieth Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

In 1995, a vast majority of the world's governments, 189 countries, adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing Platform), committing to a global framework aimed at fully realizing the human rights of women and girls. Covering twelve critical areas of human rights, it includes explicit commitments to eliminate all forms of sex-based discrimination in law and to implement positive measures toward achieving equality for all women and girls.

Since then, Equality Now, in partnership with organizations around the world, has been monitoring the progress and setbacks in implementing the Beijing Platform, with a particular focus on urging governments to honor their commitment to **“revoke any remaining laws that discriminate on the basis of sex.”** Indeed, this is an obligation under international law and essential to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the SDGs).

**The thirtieth anniversary of the Beijing Platform in 2025 marks another pivotal moment for governments to take immediate, concrete steps to turn their words into deeds.**

Legal equality remains the cornerstone of transformative change in society. Through sustained advocacy by women, girls, and their global allies, we have witnessed significant successes despite ongoing pushbacks and resistance to sex and gender equality. By continuing to shine a spotlight by providing a sample of explicitly discriminatory laws impacting women and girls throughout their lifetimes as well as global data from the World Bank, World Policy Analysis Center, and other partners, we hope this report serves as a catalyst for further meaningful change, encouraging political action and decision-makers to eliminate discrimination in the law and adopt robust legal protections.



### Five Years Since Beijing+25 Review Process

There has been notable progress to celebrate, from Cuba to Zambia. **More than 60 laws from around the world highlighted in previous reports since 1999 have been fully or partially amended or repealed, including 11 since 2020,** bringing us closer to achieving legal equality.

Women and girls continue to face various forms of discrimination, however, much of which is often perpetuated or facilitated by the laws in their countries. For example, their **personal status** is affected when governments fail to grant nationality or citizenship based on sex, impose restrictions on freedom of movement without the consent of male guardians, deny access to education, or prevent women from making independent decisions without the approval of a male 'head of household.' Similarly, women and girls experience discrimination related to their **marital status**, before, during, and after marriage. Many girls are still forced into marriage, often sanctioned by law, or are subject to lower minimum marriage ages than their male counterparts.

Women also face ongoing inequality and discrimination in the **economic sector**, including wage disparities, an unequal share of caregiving responsibilities, limited job opportunities based on sex, and discrimination in inheritance, property rights, and asset ownership. These legal inequalities leave women more vulnerable to **violence and other human rights violations**. Perpetrators of violence against women continue to enjoy impunity, especially in places where marital rape is not criminalized, or where laws exist that reduce or eliminate penalties for rapists who marry their victims.

No country has achieved full legal equality for women and girls. According to the World Bank Group's report, *Women, Business and the Law 2024*, **women still enjoy less than two-thirds of the legal rights that men do. The gender equality gap is even wider in practice due to a significant lack of enforcement of existing laws.**

### Global Pushback on Human Rights

The march toward sex-based equality continues to face pushback and rollbacks of hard-won rights. This resistance is often framed through the language of nationalism or traditional "family values," which are aimed at keeping women and girls under patriarchal control. A clear example of this rollback can be seen in sexual and reproductive rights, where some countries have criminalized access to safe abortions, removed the grounds for legal abortions, or enacted laws treating abortion as equivalent to homicide. There have also been further efforts to prohibit and criminalize same-sex relationships and ban life-saving healthcare for transgender youth.

The **anti-rights agenda** is also evident in the restrictions imposed on civil society and human rights organizations, where governments have targeted funding sources, leading to self-censorship and fostering a climate of fear. Simultaneously, legal protections against violence—both within and outside of marriage—are increasingly under threat in many countries, with growing lobbying efforts to reduce legal protections for women and weaken accountability mechanisms for perpetrators of violence against women, from Latin America to Eurasia. The crackdown on women's rights has manifested in many ways, including through the active dismantling of institutions and civil society that support women's equality. Laws that restrict the right to education, movement, and freedom of expression have been brought in many countries, from Afghanistan to the United States.

Since the last UN review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform in 2020, the world has endured the COVID-19 pandemic, causing a breakdown in social, economic, cultural, and healthcare infrastructure. The crisis exposed longstanding deficiencies in access to basic rights, leaving millions—particularly women—in devastating and unprecedented conditions. Among the many post-pandemic assessments, the importance of shoring up legal equality and non-discrimination has been emphasized as essential for building resilience and ensuring recovery.

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**Strong Foundations for Legal Equality: Constitutions and Family Law**

Additionally, two areas of law remain foundational to ending sex-based discrimination: **constitutional law and family law**. The Beijing Platform calls on governments to enact constitutional guarantees that prohibit all forms of direct or indirect discrimination based on sex, especially within the context of women's status in the family. Constitutions serve as the foundation and benchmark for all other laws, ideally ensuring they align with principles of equality, as long as there are no carve-outs or exceptions for personal status or religious laws. Explicitly prohibiting sex-based discrimination in the constitution helps protect against rollbacks of rights and acts as a barrier to the passage of discriminatory laws. While 85% of countries have constitutions that guarantee sex and/or gender-based equality, a small but important number, have thus far failed to achieve this.

There remains a need to strengthen and embolden a strategic focus on ensuring equality within the family to meet the standards set by the Beijing Platform and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Family laws, whether codified or not, governing areas such as marriage, guardianship, divorce, custody, and inheritance—impact the everyday lives of women and their families. Any sex-based discrimination in family law not only undermines women's and girls' right to equality, but also their access to education, healthcare, housing, economic security, including land and inheritance rights, and participation in public life. These interrelated challenges are further exacerbated by the climate crisis, drought, and land degradation, which increase caregiving and domestic responsibilities that disproportionately fall on women. In 2025 and beyond, no matter the political climate, discriminatory family laws require comprehensive and systemic reform.

Without eliminating all forms of discrimination in the law—whether personal, economic, marital, or in allowing or even promoting violence—women cannot fully and meaningfully participate in all aspects of life. Anything less than this is unacceptable. **Governments above all, as well as religious leaders, international human rights institutions, and decision-makers, are accountable to the people for the promises they have made at every level, and it is time to act, implement the promises of the Beijing Platform, and finally *add equality to the law*.**



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[info@equalitynow.org](mailto:info@equalitynow.org)



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A just world for women and girls.