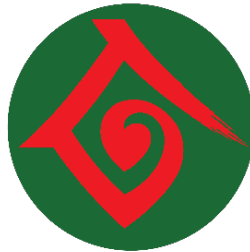




**United
Nations**

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs



INTERNATIONAL
DAY OF FAMILIES
15 MAY 2020

Background Note

Beijing + 25

Families in a Changing World:

How gender-responsive family policies can drive implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

The year 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. A quarter of a century later, the Beijing Platform for Action, with its twelve critical areas of concern, remains the most comprehensive and transformative global agenda for the achievement of gender equality. Today, its bold vision for transforming the lives of women and girls, in families, communities and economies, holds renewed relevance.

Based on submissions from 167 countries, [The Secretary General's Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly](#) is the most comprehensive assessment of progress to date. It found that there have been important gains since 1995. More girls are in school than ever before, maternal mortality has fallen significantly, and women's representation in parliaments has more than doubled since 1995. But the report also finds that the gains have been insufficient, fragile and vulnerable to reversal. This threatens progress towards the 2030 Agenda, which clearly states that development will only be sustainable if its benefits accrue equally to both women and men.

Some 32 million girls are still not in school, with marginalized groups especially likely to be deprived of the chance of an education; more than 300,000 women die in childbirth each year, from entirely preventable causes; and in 2020, three quarters of the world's parliamentarians are men. Today, violence against women is on the policy agenda in a way that was unthinkable in 1995, but the problem itself remains widespread and devastating in its impacts. The current COVID-19 crisis, which is simultaneously a health, care and economic crisis, with [highly gendered impacts](#), puts many of the gains that have been made into even greater doubt.

While policymakers and civil society often target the economy and the political sphere to bring about change on development and gender equality, what happens in the private, domestic sphere of families is equally important. Families can be spaces

of love, care, and sharing — places where we are accepted for who we are, a refuge when times are tough, and a springboard to go out into the world and achieve great things. But they are also the places where women and girls are most likely to face violence and discrimination. Whether girls can go to school, whether women can enjoy a healthy life free from violence and participate in politics at all levels is often enabled or constrained by their family relationships. As such, families can be ‘make or break’ for women and girls when it comes to enjoying their human rights and achieving their potential.

By focusing on families in its latest flagship report, [Progress of the World’s Women 2019-2020: Families in a Changing World](#), UN Women urges Governments and decision-makers to enact gender responsive family-friendly laws and policies to ensure that families are places of equality and justice. Given the importance of equality in family relations to achieving gender equality overall, the report’s recommendations have the potential to unlock progress on the Beijing Platform for Action, and the 2030 Agenda.

For example, echoing the Beijing Platform for Action and its unfinished business, *Progress* recommends the repeal of discriminatory family laws so that women can enjoy equal rights in their intimate relationships. Setting a minimum age of marriage at 18 would help to reduce child marriage, triggering huge spin-off benefits for girls’ access to education and preventing adolescent pregnancy, a leading cause of death for teenage girls. Allowing gender-equal access to divorce would

mean fewer women being trapped in violent and/or unwanted relationships. Action is also needed to ensure that women can have economic independence in their families. This means equalizing access to decent work, and boosting social protection measures such as cash benefits, accessible to families, no matter what form they take. Extra support is needed for lone parents, more than eight out of ten of whom are women, who are much more likely to live in poverty than other family types. Since women in every country do the vast majority of unpaid care and domestic work, stifling their opportunities for education, paid work and leisure, another vital set of recommendations is around supporting families to care. This can be done through providing paid maternity and parental leave, high quality childcare services and long-term care services for persons with disabilities and older persons.

As the world struggles to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, there is a real opportunity to rethink and transform the way our economies and societies function to foster greater equality for all. In doing so, it is clear that gender equality will not be achievable without greater equality in families, and that on this, and so much else, the Beijing Platform for Action continues to provide a visionary roadmap of where we need to go.