



Concept Note

Launch of *Strategy on Equality in Law for Women and Girls by 2030: A Multistakeholder Strategy for Accelerated Action*

Wednesday 20th March 2019, 09:50 –11:15

Conference Room 12, United Nations Secretariat

Introduction

Over 2.5 billion women and girls around the world are affected in multiple ways by discriminatory laws and the lack of legal protections.¹ The spaces in which laws have been designed, implemented or even studied as a profession have historically excluded women and girls. As a result, their voices and perspectives continue to be largely absent from legal frameworks and legal practices. Discrimination in law is commonplace, spanning different domains such as unequal standards for women and men in applying for a passport, choice of employment, transferring nationality to a child or foreign spouse, participating in court proceedings, receiving inheritance and deciding when and whom to marry.

Laws that promote gender equality can yield multiple dividends. For instance, among other potential benefits, a law that enables women to inherit on an equal basis with men could empower mothers to invest in the education of their daughters. This increases women's average age of marriage, because girls who stay in school are less likely to be married off. On the other hand, lower levels of gender equality in national laws are associated with fewer girls being enrolled in primary and secondary education, fewer women in skilled work, fewer women owning land, fewer women accessing financial and health services and more women facing domestic, family and sexual violence.² Furthermore, the McKinsey Global Institute recently estimated that women's equality in wages and labour force participation would boost global gross domestic product by an astonishing \$28 trillion by 2025.³

The elimination of discriminatory laws is inherent to the achievement of gender equality—a requirement for realizing the transformative ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The far-reaching implications on gender equality require taking a hard look at the laws, policies and norms that govern our societies, how they are enforced and the ways in which laws and practices enable or hinder the rights of women and girls. Towards this end, UN Women, African Union, the Commonwealth, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie and Secretaría General Ibero-Americana have issued *Equality in Law for Women and Girls by 2030: A Multistakeholder Strategy for Accelerated Action* in close collaboration with the 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, International Association of Women Judges, International Development Law Organization, Muslims for Progressive Values, and Women's Learning Partnership to address persisting gender discrimination in law. The strategy provides a framework for a concerted and multistakeholder approach aimed at fast tracking the elimination of discriminatory laws and documenting experiences and lessons learned for scale up and replication.

¹ McKinsey Global Institute. 2015. *The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality Can Add \$12 Trillion to Global Growth*. McKinsey & Company, p. 75.

² Natasha Scott Despoja. 2016. "Advancing Legal Gender Equality Under the SDGs." Women Deliver, 7 May. <http://womendeliver.org/2016/advancing-legal-gender-equality-under-the-sdgs/>.

³ McKinsey Global Institute. 2015. *The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality Can Add \$12 Trillion to Global Growth*. McKinsey & Company, p. 1.

About the strategy

Responding to the adverse impact of discriminatory laws on women and girls, the strategy presented in *Equality in Law for Women and Girls by 2030* focuses on the repeal or revision of discriminatory laws as an important part of a broader legal reform agenda that supports the achievement of gender equality. **Between 2019 and 2023, the strategy aims to fast track the repeal of discriminatory laws in six thematic areas in 100 countries and is expected to address the legal needs of over 100 million women and girls.**

An evaluation to be conducted at the end of 2024 will serve as a basis of reporting on lessons learned and promising practices and feed into various processes such as periodic reviews of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the High-level Political Forum. The strategy's following six areas of focus were selected based on extensive consultation with partners:

1. *Comprehensive reforms*: Repeal discriminatory laws that directly and indirectly impact women and girls in 20 countries
2. *Promoting women's economic empowerment*: Repeal laws that undermine equal pay, recognition of unpaid care work, protection of domestic workers, parental leave and freedom of choice of employment in 15 countries
3. *Eliminating harmful and discriminatory minimum age of marriage provisions*: Promote 18 years as the minimum age of marriage, equalize the age of marriage between women and men and eliminate related exceptions as appropriate in 15 countries
4. *Ending gender discrimination in nationality laws*: Uphold women's rights to equality in nationality and citizenship laws in 25 countries
5. *Addressing discriminatory rape laws*: Revise provisions that exempt perpetrators from rape charges if they marry the survivor in 10 countries
6. *Promoting equality in family relations*: Repeal gender discriminatory personal status laws (one or more of the following: marriage, divorce, parental rights and inheritance) in 15 countries.

The Equality in Law strategy builds on existing programmes and partnerships which align with and contribute to the objective of eliminating discriminatory laws and further optimizes the benefits of sharing platforms, resources and technical expertise. Examples of such initiatives include the UN and the EU Spotlight initiative on the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls; the UNICEF-UNFPA-UN Women Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage; the report of the United Nations Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment; the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights; and the Equal Pay International Coalition.

Implementation of the strategy will be undertaken through 12 implementation accelerators which includes gender analysis of existing laws, policy dialogue, country visits of the UN Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women, in law and in practice and leveraging high level support within and outside of the UN. The strategy takes into account, the catalytic role of Parliaments as well as regional and intergovernmental bodies.

The High-Level Launch Event

The high-level launch event for *Equality in Law for Women and Girls by 2030* will take place on Wednesday 20th March in Conference Room 12 of the United Nations Secretariat from 09.50-11.15. It brings together government representatives, civil society organizations and UN partners with the primary

objective of generating awareness on the important role of gender equal laws in the achievement of gender equality and reinforce the importance of eliminating discriminatory laws in all countries.

The event will be moderated by the Global Executive Director of Equality Now, Yasmeen Hassan and take the form of a roundtable conversation on experiences, solutions and commitments towards the elimination of discriminatory laws.