

# PROGRESS OF THE WORLD'S WOMEN 2019-2020

SUMMARY



FAMILIES  
IN A CHANGING  
WORLD



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# SUMMARY

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## FAMILIES IN A CHANGING WORLD

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# FAMILIES IN A CHANGING WORLD

The world is rapidly changing. Families, and the role of women and girls within them, are also changing. Today, there is no ‘standard’ family form, nor has there ever been. In order for laws and policies to support families and meet the needs of all their members, they must evolve and adapt. *Progress of the World’s Women* assesses the scale and scope of transformations in family life, and their implications for gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Drawing on the best available data from around the world, this Report proposes a comprehensive agenda for key policy actors—including gender equality advocates, national governments and international agencies—to make human rights a reality for all women and girls, no matter what kind of family they live in.

Today, there are many indications that women are increasingly able to exercise agency and voice within their families. These include the rising age of marriage; greater social and legal recognition of a diversity of partnership forms; declines in birth rates as women are better able to choose whether and when to have children, and how many; and women’s increased economic autonomy. These transformations are both causes and consequences of large-scale demographic changes, dramatic shifts in women’s and girls’ access to education and employment, ideational and normative changes, and legal reform, often driven and inspired by women’s activism.

This activism and a strong reaffirmation of human rights values are needed more than ever, in a context in which backlash against the gains that have been made is growing stronger by the day. Concerted efforts to roll back the achievements of many decades of work for gender equality, by those who deny women the right to make their own decisions, have recently been cloaked in the rhetoric of ‘family values’. In reality, the proponents of these views have not only sought to undermine women’s rights, but have simultaneously adopted policies that erode the conditions that enable families and their members to thrive.

## Families can be make or break for women and girls

Families are a key building block of societies, without which communities and economies could not function. It is through families that people share resources such as housing and income, look after those who are sick and frail, and reproduce, nurture and care for the next generation. Families can be places of love and affection, and pivotal for each member’s sense of identity and belonging.

However, within families, women and girls too often face violence and discrimination. Over their lifetimes, around one in three women can expect to experience physical or sexual abuse at the hands of an intimate partner. In some countries, girls are not able to inherit property, while in others, women are required by law to obey their husbands, their voices stifled and their agency eroded. The recognition of families as a contradictory space for women and girls is at the heart of this Report.

The inequality, discrimination and disadvantage that women and girls can face in their family lives and relationships are neither natural, nor inevitable. Therefore, the urgent challenge for policy-makers, activists and people in all walks of life, is to transform families into places of equality and justice, a springboard from which women and girls can realize their rights.

## Unlocking progress on the Sustainable Development Goals

Ensuring that families are places of equality and are free from discrimination is essential for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Meeting SDG 5, gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, for example, demands the elimination of violence and an end to harmful practices; ensuring women have access to economic resources, including through equal inheritance rights and equality in family laws; and promoting shared responsibility for the provision of unpaid care and domestic work, which falls disproportionately on women’s shoulders.

To 'Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all' (SDG 3), women need access to reproductive healthcare and family planning; to 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (SDG 4), girls must be able to delay marriage and complete their schooling; to 'Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all' (SDG 8), family-friendly policies and workplace regulations must be in place, including those that enable women and men to combine care giving with paid work.

Implementing the family-friendly policy agenda outlined in this Report has the potential to create synergies and unlock progress across generations, both on gender equality and on sustainable development more broadly. In order to tailor and apply this agenda to national and local contexts, policy-makers need to understand how gendered power relations enable or constrain women's rights in families; and recognize the diverse and changing nature of family forms.

## WOMEN NEGOTIATING COOPERATION AND CONFLICT IN FAMILIES

This Report approaches families as institutions where both cooperation (solidarity and love) and conflict (inequality and violence) coexist (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> It draws on insights from feminist economics to explain how unequal outcomes within families are influenced by family members' unequal bargaining power, for example in the sharing of resources or the division of unpaid care and domestic work, and proposes solutions.

In addition to the role of earned income in enabling women to negotiate for their rights within families, the Report also highlights the valuable contribution of social support systems (e.g. community groups or women's rights organizations), state-based entitlements (e.g. social protection systems and legal services) and progressive social norms.<sup>2</sup> Understanding families in this way, how do women and girls fare within them?

### More resources in (some) women's hands

Progress is notable in women's increased access to resources, through earned income, social protection, and asset ownership. This has triggered some shifts in the balance of power within the home, giving women greater economic security and weight in decision-making processes, and helping them buffer their families from economic privation.

Yet even in developed countries where women's gains have been more sweeping and sustained, those who live with a male partner still generally contribute less than half of the family income and accumulate an even smaller share of its wealth.<sup>3</sup> 'Motherhood penalties' in the form of reduced employment rates and a pay gap between women with and without children are a persistent problem.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, in a world where wealth and assets are increasingly concentrated and controlled by a fraction of the global population, women's gains have been uneven between countries, and among different groups of women.<sup>5</sup> Lone-mother families that lack income protection from a second earner, for example, face a much higher risk of poverty compared to two-parent families.<sup>6</sup>

### But care-giving remains strongly feminized

While overall, women's access to economic resources has improved, the distribution of unpaid care work remains very unequal. Compared to men, women do three times the amount of unpaid care and domestic work within families, with particularly stark inequalities in developing-country contexts, where access to time-saving infrastructure and public services is more limited.<sup>7</sup>

**FIGURE 1** WOMEN NEGOTIATING FOR RIGHTS IN FAMILIES

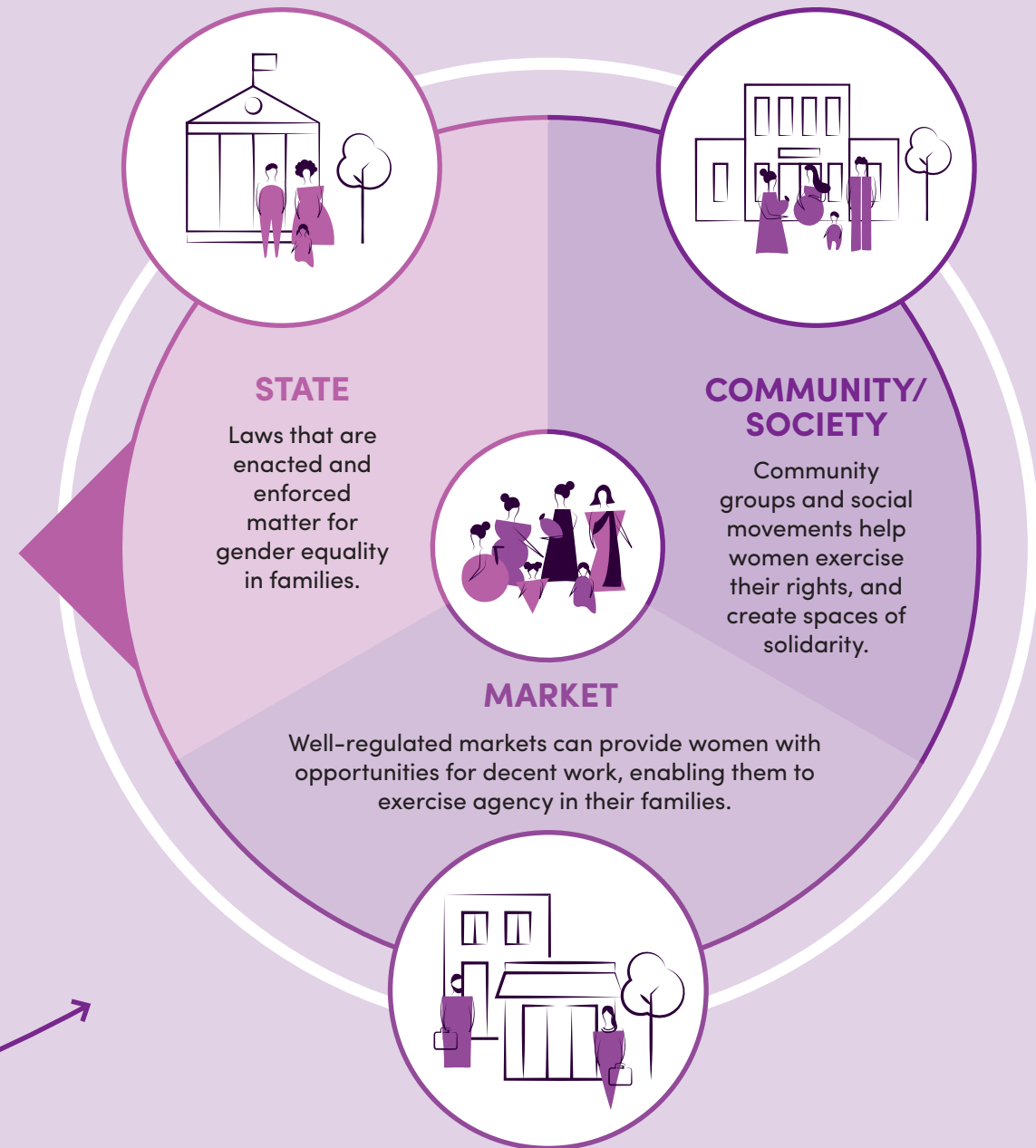
Gender inequality in family relationships means that women often have to bargain for their fair share - of money, food, leisure time and decision-making power.

Families are sites of cooperation and conflict



Families influence institutions

Actions by states, communities and markets can help women to bargain for their rights in families



Institutions influence families

Source: Based on Sen 1990a; Agarwal 1997.

In many regions there is a stark care deficit, in which the needs of children and older persons in particular are not matched by institutionalized care services. When professional care is unavailable or unaffordable, women and girls are expected to fill the gap, which either reduces their time for schooling, paid work and rest, or results in care needs being neglected. This dynamic has negative consequences for women's ability to access decent paid work, as well as for their own mental and physical health.

### ... even when women migrate

In an increasingly globalized world, and one in which forced displacement is on the rise, many families negotiate their members' sustenance and care at a distance. While families, communities and states increasingly rely on women's ability and willingness to migrate and generate income, men do not always take responsibility for the care of dependants back home. Indeed, migration underscores the extent to which women's roles as care providers within families endure; in a mother's absence, grandmothers and older daughters often step in to assist in dependants' care.

When families migrate together—which they are not always able to do—they have uneven access to social protection and public services. Such gaps are particularly acute for migrants with irregular status, and in contexts of humanitarian crisis.

### Violence against women and girls persists

The darkest manifestation of conflict within families is violence against women and girls. Following decades of feminist activism, violence in the family has been recognized as a public concern rather than a private issue. There now exist laws, action plans, protection and support services, and a growing number of violence prevention measures.

Despite these efforts, violence against women and girls in families persists at astonishingly high rates throughout their lives and across world regions. Violence in the family is frequently lethal: in 2017, an estimated 58 per cent of all female victims of intentional homicide were killed by a member of their own family, amounting to 137 women killed each day.<sup>8</sup>

## FAMILIES TODAY: CHANGING AND DIVERSE

Families today do not take a single form, nor did they in the past. Based on the latest available global data, the Report documents the significant diversity in family structures and relationships that exists across regions, within countries, and over time.

Taking the household as a unit of analysis, a little over one third of households globally (38 per cent) consist of a couple with children of any age (see Figure 2).<sup>9</sup> Even these households are far from homogeneous, as they vary by income level, for example, or the age difference between children. Almost two thirds of all households take a different form, and among these, nearly one third (27 per cent) are extended households that for example include grandparents, aunts or uncles.

Lone-parent households, 84 per cent of which globally are lone-mother households, and households composed of heterosexual or same-sex couples

without children, are also common in many regions.<sup>10</sup> In ageing societies, single-person households are increasingly prevalent.

What explains variation in family composition across regions, and within countries? Differences in public policies, social norms, demographic shifts and employment patterns all play a role.<sup>11</sup>

### Changes in intimate partnerships

Over the past three decades, significant changes have occurred in whether, when and with whom women and men form intimate partnerships. Women and men across all world regions are delaying marriage.<sup>12</sup> This has enabled women to complete their education, gain a stronger foothold in the labour market, and support themselves financially.<sup>13</sup>

Cohabitation is on the rise, and in some regions, an increasing number of women are opting out of marriage

altogether. These decisions can arise out of necessity as much as choice when the cost of setting up a family for some couples is too high.<sup>14</sup> It can also reflect women's growing reluctance to enter into partnerships in which they are expected to take on a subordinate role.

A rise in divorce rates has been one of the most visible features of family change in most regions since the 1980s.<sup>15</sup> The liberalization of divorce laws in some developed countries has led to lower rates of suicide by women, a lower incidence of reported domestic violence and fewer instances of women being murdered by their spouses.<sup>16</sup>

Yet increases in divorce and separation can also give rise to other forms of vulnerability for women. Ending a relationship typically entails far more adverse economic consequences for women than for men. All too often, women lose access to marital assets, resources, or even child custody.<sup>17</sup>

### Women's voice and agency in reproductive matters

Childbearing is one of the central pillars of family life, and one in which great transformations are

occurring. All over the world, birth rates are declining, although the pace of change varies across regions.

On the one hand, this shift indicates that women are exercising greater agency and voice in decisions regarding whether and when to have children, and how many. In practical terms, smaller families can be less costly to maintain, and women's care and domestic work burden within them may be smaller.

On the other hand, declining birth rates in some regions also indicate that women and men may be having fewer children than they desire. Couples may be limiting the number of children they have in response to economic conditions that make child-rearing financially challenging or because in the absence of quality long-term care services, they also have older parents to care for. Women may also choose to have fewer children because men still do not do their fair share of unpaid care and domestic work.

Understanding both the gender dynamics of families, and the diversity of forms they take across regions, over time, and even within women's and men's own lifetimes, are essential bases for policy-making.

## WHAT ROLE FOR PUBLIC ACTION?

The relationship between families, economies and governments is a symbiotic one: each needs the other to flourish and to achieve stable and prosperous societies. Well-functioning markets and states need families to produce labour, buy goods and services, pay taxes, and nurture productive members of society. Yet the contributions that families make are not infinitely elastic. Treating them as a 'bottomless well', on which the private and public sectors infinitely draw, can have dire consequences for families and their individual members. Austerity, stagnating wages, conflict and accelerating climate change make it especially difficult for families to sustain themselves; in this context, supportive communities, markets and states are all the more imperative.<sup>18</sup>

States have a special responsibility to support families, as a result of their human rights obligations. More than 70 years ago, the Universal Declaration

of Human Rights (UDHR) recognized families as a fundamental unit of society, one which requires protection and assistance.<sup>19</sup> In international law, the protection of the family is intrinsically linked to the principle of equality and non-discrimination, especially with regard to marriage.<sup>20</sup> The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) makes clear that family relations must be read in light of this principle (article 16). Applying it to the family context implies that all laws, policies and practices regarding the family should be undertaken without discriminating against individual members of the family or against any form of family.

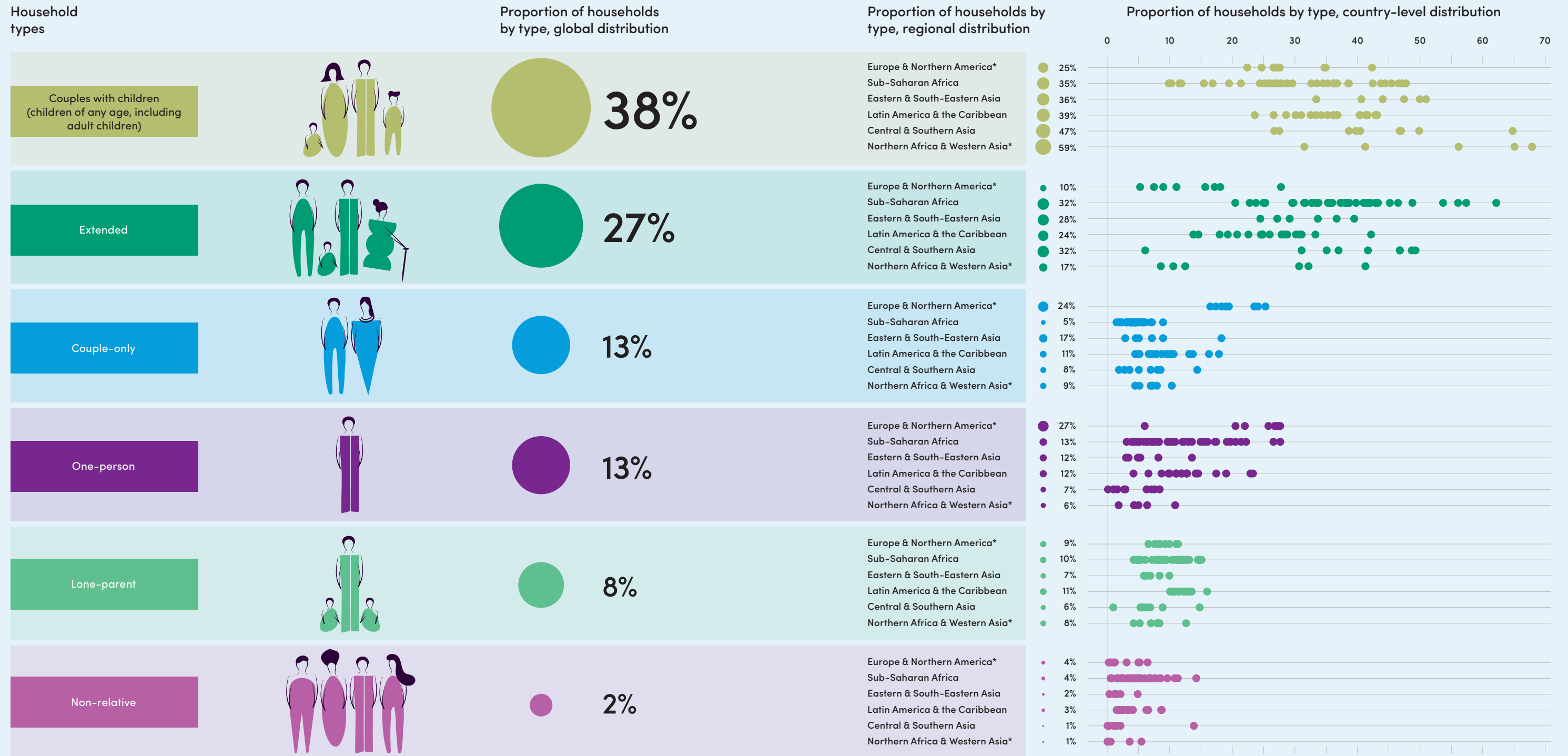
CEDAW also contested the artificial separation of the 'public' from the 'private' sphere and made clear that States have as much obligation to ensure human rights are fulfilled in the 'private' world of marriage and family, as they do in the 'public' world of markets and politics.<sup>21</sup>



# FIGURE 2 HOUSEHOLD TYPES: GLOBAL AND REGIONAL AVERAGES

Globally, less than four in every ten households are formed by a couple living with children (of any age).

Diversity is the norm in household composition: in Sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Southern Asia, close to a third of all households are extended; in several regions, one in ten are lone-parent households.



Source: Regional values calculated by UN Women using published country-level estimates from the UN DESA 2018a. For this analysis, data on China are based on estimates produced and published in Hu and Peng 2015.

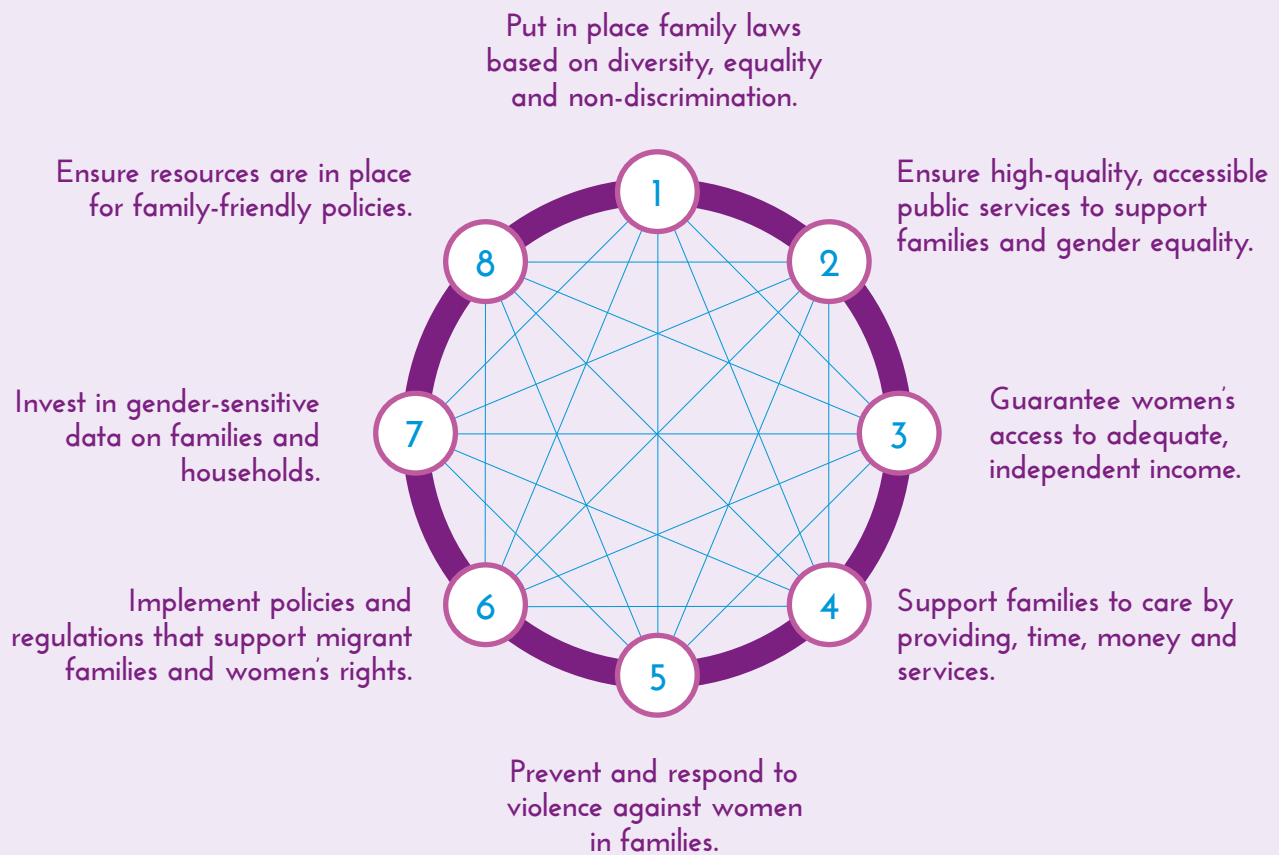
Note: Regional estimates marked with an asterisk (\*) are based on less than two-thirds of their respective regional population and should be treated with caution: Europe and Northern America (41.0 per cent of the population) and Northern Africa and Western Asia (36.1 per cent of the population). Global and regional distributions of households by type may not total 100 due to rounding. Population coverage was insufficient for Oceania and therefore not shown.

Additional conventions evoked in this Report provide a legal framework and detailed policy guidance on a comprehensive set of social, economic and cultural rights, including the obligation to ensure that all couples and individuals have the right “to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children” (ICPD Programme of Action);<sup>22</sup> the obligation to eradicate violence against women and girls in all its manifestations, including within families (CEDAW General Recommendation 35);<sup>23</sup> and the obligation to protect the rights of the child (CRC).<sup>24</sup>

While this Report identifies governments as the principal actors, duty bearers and champions of

gender equality and women’s rights, other key agents of change also have a role to play. Chief among these are women’s rights and feminist organizations, which have historically been a major engine of change, often building alliances with labour unions, faith organizations and the private sector to change and implement laws and policies that advance gender equality within and outside the family. The Report’s policy agenda supports a vision for families as a home for equality and justice—a place where women and girls can exercise agency and voice, and where they have economic security and physical safety.

## MOVING FORWARD: A FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICY AGENDA



# 1. PUT IN PLACE FAMILY LAWS BASED ON DIVERSITY, EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

States, communities and religious institutions regulate and intervene in marriage and family life through laws and policies. Family laws, which govern marriage (including minimum age of marriage), divorce, child custody and guardianship, adoption and inheritance often include gender discriminatory provisions, creating an unequal playing field for women and girls in many parts of the world. A lack of legal rights to initiate a divorce, or the threat of losing custody of children, can skew gendered power relations within marriages, and trap women in unsatisfactory or even violent relationships. Women's agency to exit unhappy partnerships is also undermined in contexts where marital property regimes fail to recognize their unpaid contributions

or where men are not required to pay their fair share for their children's maintenance.

But, as the example of Tunisia shows (see Box 1), discriminatory family laws can and do change, often as a result of long-term campaigns by women's rights activists and their allies in government, the judiciary and civil society. In most regions, there has been a strong trend towards equalization of family laws, especially since the 1950s.<sup>25</sup> Further reform is needed, including so that family laws take account of the actual diversity of partnership arrangements, including to ensure that the rights of women in same-sex and/or cohabiting relationships are protected.

## BOX 1

### PROGRESS ON FAMILY LAWS IN TUNISIA

Tunisia has been a leader in the Arab world on gender-equitable laws since 1956, when its Code of Personal Status provided for marriage based on mutual consent and equality for women in divorce proceedings.

Nearly 60 years later, in 2014, the Government removed all reservations to CEDAW and a new constitution was enacted that granted women far-reaching new rights.<sup>26</sup> Women's civil society organizations played a critical role in this achievement. They worked across party lines and historical divisions between Islamist and secular women's rights groups to establish the National Dialogue for Women, which developed an inclusive platform for their demands regarding the new constitution.<sup>27</sup> They used social media to generate awareness of, and opposition to, a draft clause that would have positioned women as 'complementary' to men, and as a result, the draft was amended to provide that "all citizens, male and female, have equal rights and duties, and are equal before the law without any discrimination" (article 21).<sup>28</sup>

The new constitution provided a firm foundation for significant legislative changes in 2017, including passing of the Law on Eliminating Violence Against Women, repeal of the penal code provision that had allowed a rapist to escape punishment if he married his victim, and changes to laws that prevented Muslim women from marrying non-Muslims.<sup>29</sup>

In 2018, steps have been taken to make Tunisia the first country in the region to legislate for equal inheritance rights.<sup>30</sup> Islamic feminists in the region argue that inheritance laws require reform not only on the basis of equality and justice, but also to keep pace with changes in the structure and dynamics of family life. Women's lesser access to inheritance has historically been justified because of men's roles as providers for women and children. Now that a sizeable proportion of households in some countries in the region are maintained by women alone,<sup>31</sup> Islamic feminists argue that the case for change is irrefutable and urgent.<sup>32</sup>

## 2. ENSURE HIGH-QUALITY, ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC SERVICES TO SUPPORT FAMILIES AND GENDER EQUALITY

Public services including education and reproductive healthcare play a critical role in both supporting families and advancing gender equality. In developed countries, education has opened up new horizons for women beyond the domestic sphere, while in developing countries, secondary school attendance is correlated with declines in early marriage and adolescent childbearing. Further efforts are required to reach girls in rural areas, girls with disabilities, those from minority ethnic groups, and those in the poorest households. Curricula that promote gender equality and healthy relationships are essential, as well as ensuring that schools are welcoming to and do not discriminate against pregnant girls and young parents.

Control over their own fertility underpins women's well-being, opportunities and the enjoyment of all their other human rights. In 1970, only 42.2 per cent of women worldwide aged 15–49 married or in a union who wanted to use a modern method of contraception did so; by 2015, this had reached 77.2 per cent (see Figure 3). In order to ensure that women have agency and voice within their partnerships, further progress is required in women's and men's access to rights-based reproductive healthcare services, which often go hand-in-hand with overall health systems strengthening, as the example of Rwanda shows (see Box 2). As mandated by the Human Rights Committee, policies to reduce deaths and suffering caused by unsafe abortion are also urgently needed.<sup>33</sup>

### BOX 2

#### SCALING UP FAMILY PLANNING AND HEALTHCARE SERVICES IN RWANDA

In a region where weak health systems and high birth rates are common, Rwanda has made tremendous strides in rapidly increasing access to family planning and reproductive health services, with measurable benefits for women, families and the broader society.

In 1970, modern contraception only met 0.2 per cent of demand for family planning in Rwanda. By 2030, it is projected to reach 78.2 per cent, well above the average for Sub-Saharan Africa (62.0 per cent).<sup>34</sup> Over the past four decades, Rwanda's total fertility rate more than halved from 8.3 to 3.8 live births per woman,<sup>35</sup> while the maternal mortality ratio declined from 1,300 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 290 in 2015.<sup>36</sup>

This progress is the result of government action that prioritized health system strengthening. For example, Rwanda established nursing and midwifery schools to increase the number of trained nurses, midwives and doctors. Today, community healthcare workers also play an important role in service delivery, distributing condoms and contraceptives. Community-based health insurance was introduced in 1999, and by 2010, coverage rates had reached 78 per cent of Rwandans.<sup>37</sup>

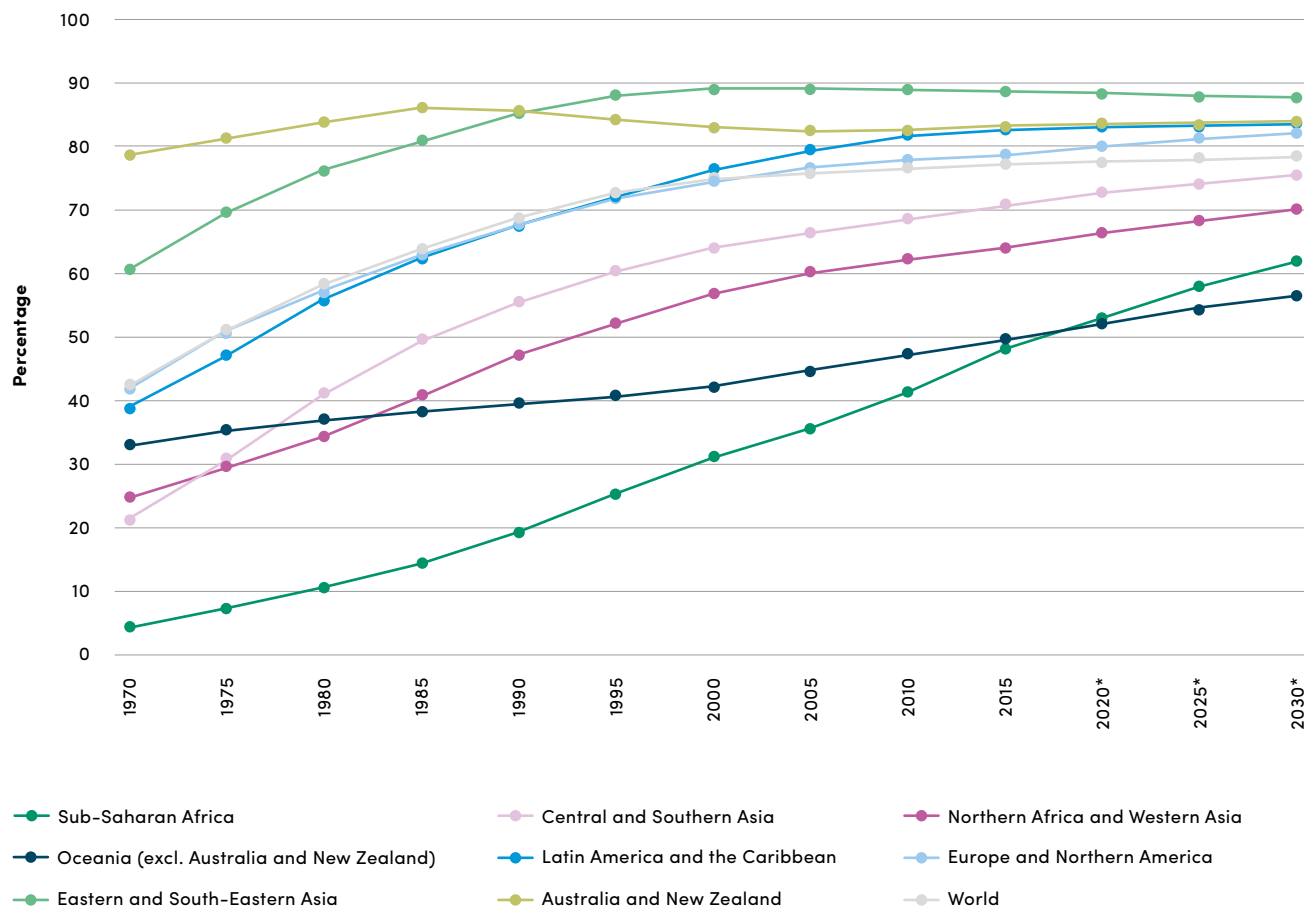
Effective mobilization of both domestic and external finance has been key. Rwanda has a rigorous mechanism for managing donor funding, insisting that all donor support is channelled to existing government priorities.<sup>38</sup> Healthcare expenditure has increased from US\$7.91 per capita in 2002, to US\$48.08 in 2016, exceeding the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended minimum of US\$44.00.<sup>39</sup>

A number of challenges remain. Discriminatory attitudes and beliefs remain entrenched in some contexts. Many women report that they cannot access contraception without their husband's approval. Unmarried adolescent girls' access to family planning is often limited, including due to disapproving attitudes among some community health workers.<sup>40</sup> Youth corners in health centres or stand-alone youth centres have helped to provide services and privacy for young women, but these are not yet widespread.<sup>41</sup>



FIGURE 3

## DEMAND FOR FAMILY PLANNING SATISFIED BY MODERN CONTRACEPTIVE METHODS BY REGION, MARRIED OR IN-UNION WOMEN AGED 15-49, 1970-2030



Source: UN Women calculations from UN DESA 2018b and UN DESA 2018c.

Notes: Includes 185 countries and areas with populations of 90,000 inhabitants or more, based on data available as of February 2018. Country median (adjusted) estimates of percentages were converted into number of women estimates by multiplying each estimated percentage by the number of married or in-union women aged 15-49 for the reference year and country. Regional and global estimates of percentages were obtained by dividing the number of women using modern contraceptive methods by the number of married or in-union women aged 15-49 who expressed a demand for family planning for the reference year and region. Data for 2020, 2025 and 2030, marked with an asterisk (\*), are based on projections.

### 3. GUARANTEE WOMEN'S ACCESS TO ADEQUATE, INDEPENDENT INCOME

For families to thrive, they need access to an adequate income, which may be gained through market-based work, returns on assets such as land, or social transfers from social protection systems. Having an income of their own enables women to be on a more equal footing with men in their intimate relationships, strengthens their bargaining position within families, and enables them to exit partnerships if they need to. Yet, marriage and the presence of young children in the household tends to dampen women's labour force participation (see Figure 4) and is associated with 'motherhood penalties' in wages. Social norms which restrict married women's ability to engage in work

outside of the home, though rigid, can be overcome, as the example of Bangladesh shows (see Box 3).

Labour market and macroeconomic policies to generate decent work are needed along with gender-responsive social protection systems that support diverse families. The essential components of social protection to meet these goals include: paid maternity and parental leave; social transfers for families with children, with additional support for lone parents; and adequate pensions through a combination of gender-responsive contributory and non-contributory systems.

#### BOX 3

#### NEGOTIATING SOCIAL NORMS ON WOMEN'S PAID WORK IN BANGLADESH

In some contexts, women's labour force participation generates resistance from spouses and can act as a trigger for intimate partner violence. How then did married women in Bangladesh manage to take up paid work in its export garment factories, especially in light of husbands' concerns about the implications for family 'honour' in a society where *purdah* norms require women to remain within the shelter of the home?<sup>42</sup>

Interviews with the first wave of women to enter these factories in the 1980s revealed the practical strategies they used to overcome their husbands' resistance. The intimate nature of marital relations meant that the women understood their husbands' fears and anxieties and were able to put this understanding to effective use in their negotiations.

First, women justified their desire to work in terms of shared concerns about household welfare, and especially a better future for their children. As fathers and guardians of family welfare, men found these arguments difficult to counter. Secondly, the women sought to defuse the negative social implications of their public presence by assuring their husbands that their *purdah* had not been broken because their behaviour outside the home was beyond reproach: they never 'loitered' with others after work, and they walked to and from the factories with a modest demeanour.

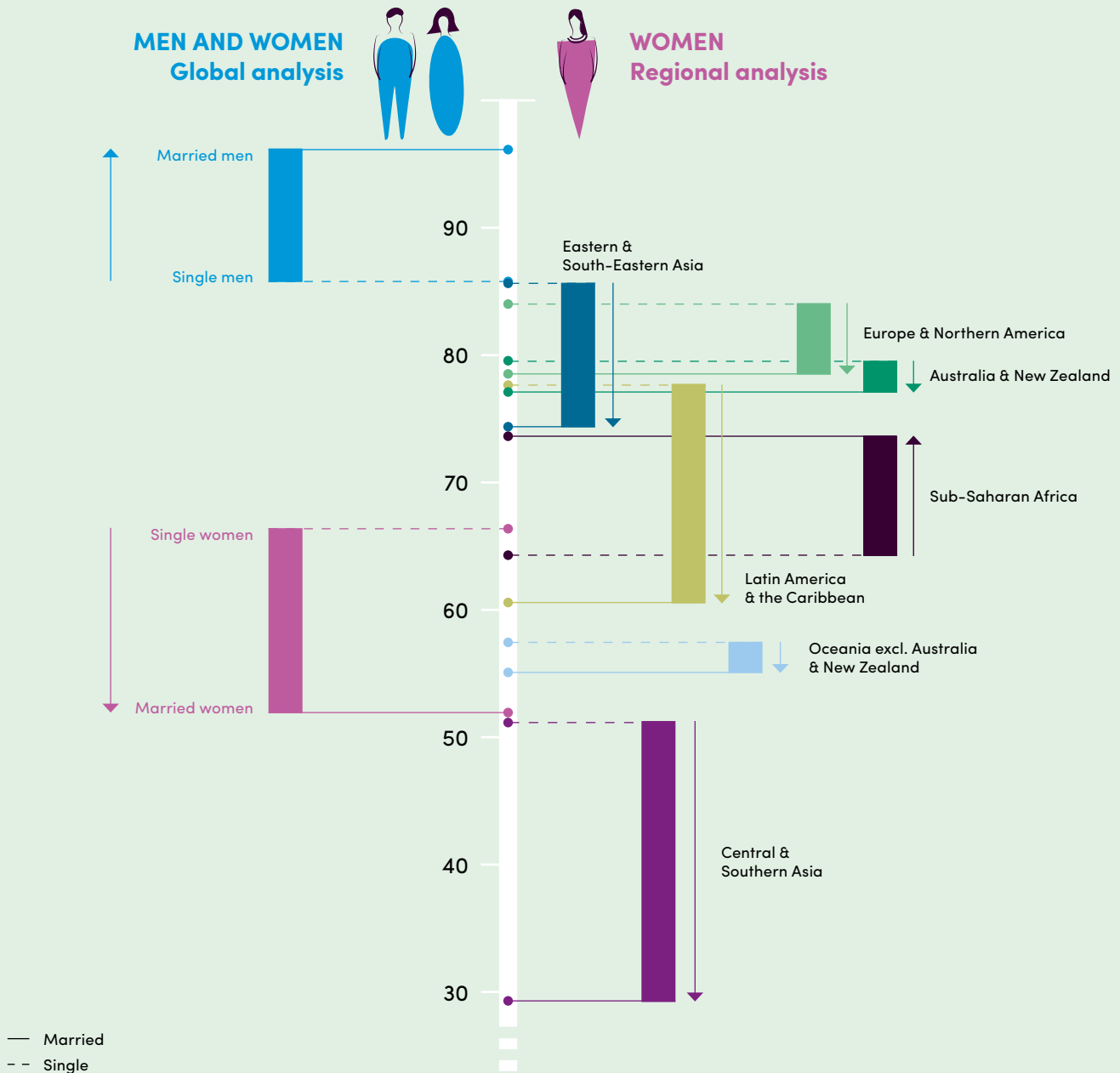
Many of the women also took measures to ensure that their employment did not affect their domestic responsibilities (or men's domestic comforts). Some devolved these responsibilities to other female family members, while others carried them out before or after work.

These strategies sought to reassure women's husbands that their work outside the home would not disrupt family life. In reality, of course, it did. Women did not become 'insubordinate' as their husbands had feared, but both sides recognized the value of women's financial contributions and there was a definite shift in the balance of power within the home.

FIGURE 4

# THE IMPACT OF MARRIAGE ON WOMEN'S AND MEN'S LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE

Globally, while marriage tends to increase men's participation in the labour force, it has the opposite effect for women.



Labour force participation rate among individuals aged 25–54, by sex, marital status and region, latest available year

Source: UN Women calculations based on data from ILO 2018b; LIS (various years) and ABS 2016b.

Notes: Data for the latest available year for each country were used, ranging from 2007–2018 and for a sample of 93 and 109 countries for the global and regional analysis, respectively. The Australia and New Zealand region contains information for Australia only. The regional aggregates presented are weighted averages based on population figures for persons aged 25–54 years (men and women respectively), obtained from UN DESA 2017m.

## 4. SUPPORT FAMILIES TO CARE BY PROVIDING TIME, MONEY AND SERVICES

Much day-to-day caring and nurturing, whether of young children, adults or frail older persons, is carried out by families, and without it, economies and societies would grind to a halt. It is women who do the vast majority of this care work. As Figure 5 shows for Latin America and the Caribbean, living in a poor household increases the amount of time women spend on unpaid care and domestic work; the same is true for women living in a rural area, being married and having young children.

While families assume a central role in care provision, other institutions and actors also play a part in financing and/or delivering care, whether through markets (e.g. paid domestic workers), the public

sector (e.g. a care home for older persons run by a municipality) or not-for-profit providers of various kinds (e.g. community childcare centre).

National care systems need to be progressively constructed to include maternity and parental leave for parents with young children; cash benefits that enable informally self-employed workers to take time off; and cash benefits and leave provisions for those caring for older family members or those living with a disability. Greater public investment is needed in basic infrastructure to reduce the drudgery of unpaid care and domestic work; in professional early childhood education and care (see Box 4); and in long-term care for people with disabilities and older persons.

### BOX 4

#### EXPANDING COVERAGE AND QUALITY OF CHILDCARE SERVICES IN ECUADOR THROUGH COMMUNITY CENTRES

The 3,800 Centres for Child Development (Centros de Desarrollo Infantil, formerly Centros Infantiles del Buen Vivir) in Ecuador provide care services to more than 138,000 children of working parents.<sup>43</sup> The services are coordinated in a centralized manner but are mainly provided through agreements between local governments and civil society organizations. Service coverage for children 5 years and younger expanded from less than 3 per cent in 2000 to over 22 per cent in 2015.

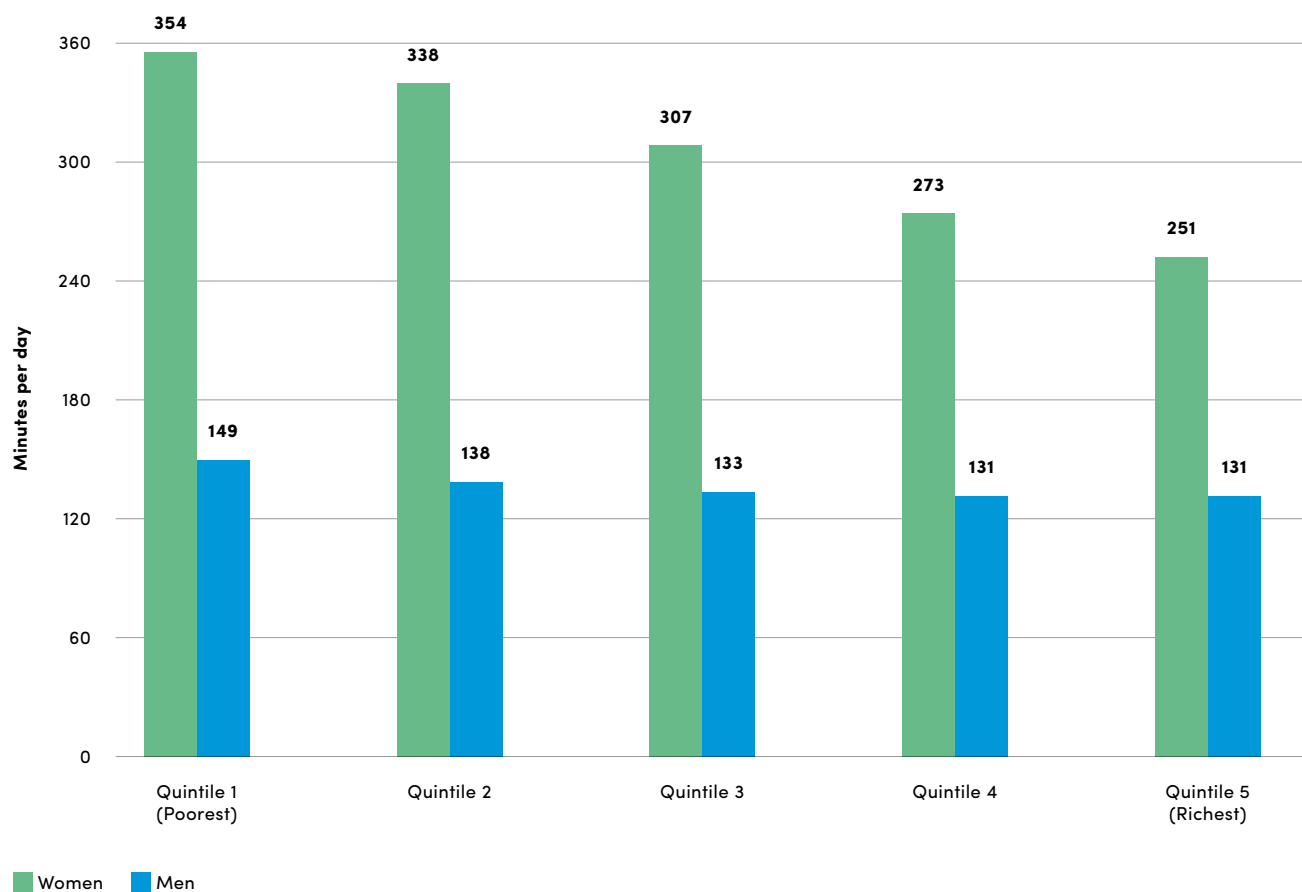
In addition to accessibility, the Government made important strides within the framework of a broader strategy aimed at improving the quality of services. For instance, it hired professionals specialized in Early Childhood Education and Care to coordinate the provision of centre-based services. Whereas until 2013, caregivers were volunteers who received only a small stipend, this workforce has been formalized and professionalized. Now called 'childhood education promoters', these workers undergo training that allows them to obtain a technical degree after three years of part-time studies, and they receive the minimum wage and full social benefits.<sup>44</sup>

Despite these achievements, additional efforts are needed to expand coverage. In the context of economic recession, the creation of new centres slowed down between 2013 and 2015. It is also necessary to continue to improve the quality of services and the training of professionals who provide care.



FIGURE 5

UNWEIGHTED AVERAGE TIME SPENT ON UNPAID CARE AND DOMESTIC WORK BY SEX AND INCOME QUINTILE, SELECTED LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES, LATEST AVAILABLE YEAR



Source: CEPAL 2018.

Note: The unweighted average is based on latest available data points for a set of 11 countries: Argentina (2013), Brazil (2012), Chile (2015), Colombia (2012), Ecuador (2012), El Salvador (2010), Guatemala (2011), Honduras (2009), Mexico (2014), Peru (2010) and Uruguay (2013), assigning each country the same relative importance.

## 5. PREVENT AND RESPOND TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN FAMILIES

Families can be sites of profound insecurity for women and girls, since the home is the place where they are most likely to face violence and abuse. Globally, 17.8 per cent of women report experiencing physical or sexual violence at the hands of an intimate partner within the last 12 months (see Figure 6).

States have clear obligations to implement laws, policies and programmes to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. Laws that define the different forms of violence against women and girls in the family as crimes are important for holding perpetrators accountable for their actions, providing victims/survivors avenues to seek justice, and signaling the unacceptability of violence in the broader community.

Family laws should be reformed to uphold women's rights in marriage, divorce and custody so that women are better able to leave abusive or violent situations. For the same reason, reform of migration regulations to ensure that migrant women have residency status that is independent of their partners is also critical. In addition to ensuring women's access to independent income, and the enactment of appropriate laws and regulations, improving women's access to justice requires a range of complementary interventions. This includes the establishment and strengthening of coordinated and multi-sectoral support services for survivors, and substantial, long-term investments in prevention programmes to address the drivers of violence (see Box 5). Such services must be protected in times of austerity.

### BOX 5

#### LESSONS LEARNED FROM SASA! A COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION INTERVENTION

SASA! is a community mobilization intervention that was started by a non-government organization (NGO) in Uganda called Raising Voices. It seeks to change community attitudes, norms and behaviours that result in gender inequality, violence and increased HIV vulnerability for women. The project examines power dynamics and gender relations, and works systematically with a broad range of stakeholders in the community to promote critical analyses and discussions. SASA!, which means 'Now' in Kiswahili, is an acronym for the four phases of the approach: Start, Awareness, Support and Action.

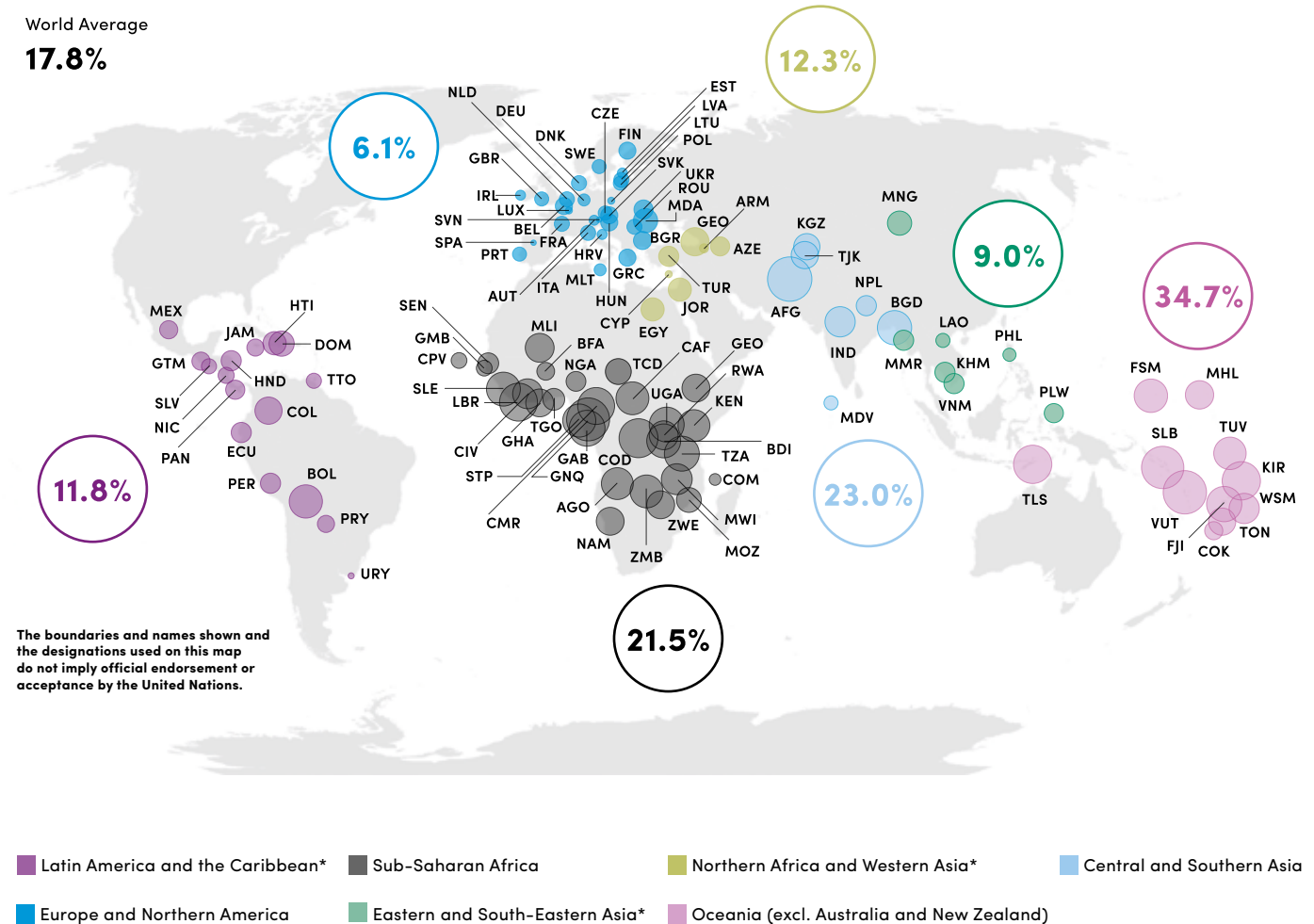
Findings from a 2013 evaluation found a reduction in reported social acceptance of physical violence in relationships among both women and men and an increase in the social acceptance of a woman's refusal of sex with her partner. Women's reported levels of physical partner violence occurring in the 12 months prior to the study were 52 per cent lower in the SASA! intervention communities compared to other communities.<sup>45</sup>

These results were achieved through SASA!'s focus on the dynamics of individual relationships, as well as the project's impact on social norms within the broader community. At the relationship level, SASA! helped couples explore the benefits of mutually supportive gender roles and encouraged improved communication and joint decision-making and problem-solving. At the community level, SASA! focused on fostering a climate of non-tolerance of violence against women. It did this through messaging and by engaging community members in discussions to reduce the acceptability of violence against women and improving individuals' skills, willingness and sense of responsibility to reduce violence against women in their communities.

The challenge for a context-specific and resource- and time-intensive intervention such as SASA! is its scalability and sustainability. Further research is needed to examine how such a model can be scaled up to national level.

FIGURE 6

PROPORTION OF EVER-PARTNERED WOMEN AND GIRLS AGED 15-49 SUBJECTED TO PHYSICAL OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE BY A CURRENT OR FORMER INTIMATE PARTNER IN THE PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS, BY REGION, LATEST AVAILABLE YEAR



Source: UNSD 2018.

Notes: The circles show population-weighted averages per region for women aged 15–49 in a total of 106 countries and territories. Population weights are based on 2017 figures for countries and territories on which sex- and age-disaggregated data are available from World Population Prospects. This analysis covers 106 countries and territories, comprising 54.4 per cent of the countries and 50 per cent of the population of women and girls aged 15–49. For Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, Latin America and Caribbean and Northern Africa and Western Asia, data cover 12.7, 48.4 and 41.7 per cent of the region's population, respectively. The regional and global aggregates marked with an asterisk (\*) are based on less than two thirds of their respective population and should be treated with caution. In all other regions, aggregates are based on data covering two thirds or more of the region's population. Population coverage was insufficient to calculate a regional average for Australia and New Zealand and therefore not shown. For 75 of the 106 countries, the age group of women is 15–49 while for 30 countries the age group is 18–49. In the case of Paraguay, the sample is for women aged 15–44 and for Portugal, the age group is 18–50. Data for Côte d'Ivoire are for currently married women only. Definition of sexual violence differs from standard for Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay and Uruguay. Definition of physical and sexual violence differs from standard for all the European countries in the sample.

## 6. IMPLEMENT POLICIES AND REGULATIONS THAT SUPPORT MIGRANT FAMILIES AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

While migration can open up new opportunities for women, it often requires families to navigate a complex web of policies and regulations that affect the conditions under which family members live together or separately. For example, there is wide cross-country variation in regulatory frameworks defining which family members qualify for family reunification, and some states require migrants to have professional qualifications or a certain skill level to qualify at all. States can make regulatory and policy choices that strengthen women's bargaining power vis-à-vis other family members, for instance by registering women who are asylum seekers and refugees separately from their male family members and granting independent

residency to women who migrate through marriage or family reunification schemes.

As the Story of Change on Indonesia shows, civil society organizations have been critical in pushing governments to enact measures to ensure that those who migrate can enjoy their human rights. Universal access to social protection and public services, that is not limited by citizenship or migration status, and includes health, education and childcare, is critical to ensuring that migrant women and their families are able to meet their caring responsibilities and are not pushed into poverty. Economic and social policies are also needed that address the factors that drive some women and men to migrate and leave their family members behind.

### MAKING PROGRESS/STORIES OF CHANGE

## GAINING PROTECTION FOR INDONESIA'S MIGRANT WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

*Millions of Indonesians working abroad now have hard-won legal protection against exploitation, thanks to the work of pioneering campaigners.*

Anis Hidayah was still a student when she picked up the newspaper one morning and read the story of a local woman who had left her young children in Indonesia to work thousands of miles away in one of the Gulf States. There she was exploited, beaten and raped by her employer. When she came home, she was treated as a social outcast and her young family was humiliated and ostracized.

Indonesia has one of the world's largest migrant worker communities. In 2016, an estimated 9 million Indonesians were working abroad. Half were women, the majority working in informal employment as domestic workers.<sup>46</sup>

Hidayah says that many families in Indonesia anticipate that at least one adult will seek work abroad, in order to secure their children's education and life opportunities. In the village where she grew up, many of Hidayah's friends were raised by grandparents while their parents lived overseas.

"I realized that this was my community and my problem as well," she says.

In 2004, Hidayah and a group of other human rights activists started Migrant Care, which fights for better protection for Indonesia's migrant workers. The organization receives more than 1,000 calls every year from workers or families needing help.





Anis Hidayah, co-founder of Migrant Care, at her home.

Photo: UN Women/Ed Wray

In 2017, the Government passed new legislation that for the first time guaranteed some basic rights to workers migrating through official channels.<sup>47</sup> “The new legislation, while not perfect, is a huge victory for us,” says Hidayah. One of the most significant provisions Migrant Care had successfully campaigned for was curtailing the power of recruitment agencies in the migration process.

Migrant Care is also helping villages to support the children left behind. “We need to know, for example, if a child stops going to school or if they are being treated badly at home while a parent is abroad,” says Hidayah. “We are helping to implement systems that place their welfare in the community’s hands, making sure the families of domestic workers are included in village development planning and budget programmes. In this way, the whole village is taking collective responsibility.”

Migrant Care’s focus is not just focused on local communities. 2017 also saw the signing of the landmark Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers, in which governments from 10 countries across the region promised to strengthen social protection, access to

justice and the human rights of millions of migrant workers in both origin and destination countries.<sup>48</sup>

While this is a triumph for the region’s civil society groups, Hidayah says there is still urgent work to be done. One of Migrant Care’s priorities is to fight for the rights of the millions of undocumented workers—those who migrate for work through unofficial channels—excluded from the Consensus and left unprotected and unacknowledged by their governments.

“We view undocumented workers from a human and labour rights perspective, but this view is still not reflected in the politics or laws of our country or our region,” says Hidayah. “Yet the advances of the last few years are giving us the confidence that we really can work towards lasting and sustainable change even on this issue.”

**“The advances of the last few years give us confidence that we can work towards lasting and sustainable change.”**

## 7. INVEST IN GENDER-SENSITIVE DATA ON FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS

Major gaps exist in our knowledge about contemporary family life. Data limitations, in all regions, significantly curtail the ability of policy-makers to design and adapt public policies to reflect the changing realities of families. Civil registration and vital statistics systems that gather information on key life events (births, deaths, marriage and divorce) need to be strengthened. At least 110 developing countries lack functional registration systems and under-record vital events of specific populations, which impacts on governments' capacity to develop and plan policies such as social transfers for families with young children.<sup>49</sup> Censuses and nationally representative surveys require methodological reshaping in order to better capture diversity

in household composition and provide reliable individual-level data. As Box 6 shows, efforts are underway in several regions to capture diverse and emerging family forms.

Biases in existing data collection tools and gender gaps in coverage need to be systematically identified and eliminated, and multilingual and multicultural capacities strengthened. Above all, these measures require investment and capacity-building of National Statistical Offices. Gender-sensitive policy-making to advance women's rights and support family life also requires multi-method and interdisciplinary approaches that complement quantitative information with contextual qualitative evidence.

### BOX 6

#### EFFORTS TO DEFINE 'EMERGING' FAMILIES IN STATISTICS

Statisticians strive to devise ways to capture 'emerging' types of families and households. These family definitions vary across national and regional contexts since they reflect context-specific patterns and policy concerns. For instance, having legally recognized a greater diversity of partnership forms, several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have prioritized documenting cohabiting and/or same-sex couples.<sup>50</sup>

European countries have considered a broader set of family forms too. This includes 'blended families' comprised of a married or cohabiting couple with one or more children along with one or more children from one or both of the partners' previous unions.<sup>51</sup> It also includes 'living apart together' relationships, which are characterized by partners who maintain an intimate relationship but live in two separate households.<sup>52</sup>

Prevailing social norms may make it difficult to include certain questions in surveys, but their absence reinforces the idea that these kinds of families or relationships are rare or non-existent, creating a cycle. It is important to break this cycle if knowledge and understanding of how families live today is to be enhanced.

## 8. ENSURE RESOURCES ARE IN PLACE FOR FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES

The Commission on the Status of Women urged Member States to implement family-oriented policies aimed at achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women.<sup>53</sup> This Report proposes a policy package that would guarantee access to basic income security and essential healthcare over the life cycle to all people, in line with the ILO Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202); and ensure that pre-school children and older adults can access quality care services. In addition to political will, such a package of family-friendly policies requires sufficient resources. Analysis commissioned for this Report shows that this is affordable for most countries.<sup>54</sup>

In order to close income, health and care gaps, for example, a quarter of countries (41 out of 155 studied) could implement the required policies for less than 3 per cent of GDP; just over half of the countries (79) could do so for less than 5 per cent of GDP. For one

fifth of countries, these policies would cost more than 10 per cent of GDP, which means that additional international support would be required (see Figure 7).

In order for these policies to be affordable, governments must raise resources in a range of ways, including by increasing tax revenues, expanding social security coverage, borrowing or restructuring debt, curtailing South-North transfers, eliminating illicit financial flows and leveraging aid and transfers.

These investments have significant pay-offs for women and girls, for families and for society. This agenda builds children's human capabilities, safeguards the dignity and human rights of people with disabilities and older persons, and creates decent employment opportunities for women and men in the care sector.

FIGURE 7

NUMBER OF COUNTRIES, BY RESOURCES NEEDED TO CLOSE INCOME, HEALTH AND CARE GAPS, AS A PROPORTION OF GDP, 2015



Sources: Bierbaum and Cichon forthcoming.

Notes: Data for 2015 or the latest available year for each country was used, for a sample of 155 countries. When no country estimates for input data are available, values are imputed based on average values in countries in the same region and income category (except for data on poverty gaps, unemployment rates and labour force participation rates, skilled birth delivery, and spending on long-term care).



## ENDNOTES

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## UN WOMEN

UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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