

Progress of the world's women 2019-2020: Families in a changing world ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS from the executive summary

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 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.

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