



Progress and backlash: Accountability for the rights of women and girls

Words & Deeds update

March 2026

EN Equality
Now

A just world for all women and girls



About Equality Now

Equality Now is a worldwide human rights organisation dedicated to securing the legal and systemic change needed to end discrimination against all women and girls, everywhere in the world. Since its inception in 1992, it has played a role in reforming 130 discriminatory laws globally, positively impacting the lives of hundreds of millions of women and girls, their communities and nations, both now and for generations to come.

Working with partners at national, regional and global levels, Equality Now draws on deep legal expertise and a diverse range of social, political and cultural perspectives to continue to lead the way in steering, shaping and driving the change needed to achieve enduring gender equality, to the benefit of all.

Table of contents

Introduction	4
Progress	5
Implementation of international and regional multilateral and normative legal standards	5
States join the Maputo Protocol	5
Latvia membership in the Istanbul Convention maintained	5
The Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR) delivers two landmark legal opinions on the human right to care and the climate emergency	5
Legal reforms ending sex-based discrimination in the law	6
Kuwait's Penal Code	6
Kyrgyzstan's Labour Code	6
Iraq's Personal Status Law	6
Malaysia's constitutional amendment	6
Advocacy for legal reform continues	7
Setbacks	8
Multilateral system under stress	8
Dismantling of State institutions protecting women's rights	8
Rise of gender stereotypes and weaponisation of 'family values'	9
Removing access to education on gender identity, and sexual and reproductive rights	9
African Bar Association's model reservations to the African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (AU-CEVAWG)	9
Restrictions on abortion rights and access to information in Puerto Rico	9
Recommendations	10
1. Support international and national civil society organisations	10
2. Foster national, regional, and cross-regional cooperation and collaboration	10
3. Adopt a comprehensive and multi-sectoral response	11
4. Implement evidence-based proactive response	12
5. Support health and the right to care of women's rights defenders	12
Conclusion	13
Endnotes	14

Introduction

Since 1999, Equality Now's *Words & Deeds* reports have highlighted specific laws requiring urgent repeal or amendment to advance equality for all women and girls. The reports situate these within the broader pursuit of legal equality in the realms of personal, economic and marital status, and the right to be free from gender-based violence, and identify the most pressing areas for legal reform. Our 2025 *Words & Deeds* report,¹ which provides an overview of the global legal equality landscape, underscored that we are currently in a particularly dangerous phase of backlash against the rights of women and girls, especially for those with intersecting, marginalised identities.

In our *Global backlash against women's and girls' rights, Words & Deeds Update* (Sept. 2025),² additional specific examples of backlash were highlighted, with recommendations for States to not only mitigate the harm unfolding but also to invest seriously in building the legal and institutional infrastructure to achieve equality for women and girls. Indeed, according to the World Bank's *Women, Business and the Law 2026* report,³ still no country in the world has achieved legal equality between men and women. And even when good laws exist, they are often not well supported by mechanisms and institutions to be meaningfully effective. Efforts to recognise inequality and backlash, analyse the underlying foundations, and develop strategies to oppose discriminatory laws and the backlash are an urgent and necessary step.

The backlash on the human rights of women and girls is also part of broader global developments. Multilateral systems, particularly the United Nations (UN), are under increasing strain due to a financial crisis⁴ driven by

inconsistent or reduced member State contributions to the UN budget. This is compounded by a fractured global order marked by military conflicts, social and economic crises, and heightened regional tensions that the UN has been unable to, and in some cases isn't structurally designed to, adequately address, despite its critical role in monitoring and documenting human rights violations and intervening to prevent further violations. These dynamics have affected not only the functioning of the system and its personnel, but also rights-holders' trust in the international legal framework. To respond to some of the challenges, the UN introduced the 'UN80 initiative'⁵ in March 2025, a systems-wide reform with an Action Plan⁶ that includes a potential merger of UN Women with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).⁷

Although 2025 was a challenging year for human rights, it was also marked by genuine progress and impactful legal reform. An overview of advances toward gender justice in laws and policies, alongside an analysis of instances of backlash, is provided below. **This *Words & Deeds* update aims to help map the nature, types and geographic scope of harmful actions currently underway.** While by no means exhaustive, **it is intended to support the development of collective legal and other strategies to build resilient opposition to these trends.**

This *Words & Deeds* update concludes with a set of recommendations which should continue to be refined as knowledge sharing expands and expertise grows on integrating human rights standards into laws and policies to counter backlash and the rollback of women's rights.

Progress

Implementation of international and regional multilateral and normative legal standards

States join the Maputo Protocol

In July 2025, the Central African Republic (CAR) officially ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa,⁸ commonly known as the Maputo Protocol⁹, becoming the 46th African Union Member State to join this groundbreaking treaty to protect and promote the rights of women and girls. The Maputo Protocol is one of the strongest in promoting reproductive rights and the prohibition of child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM).

Latvia membership in the Istanbul Convention maintained

Disinformation, the anti-rights movement, and resulting polarisation, contributed to the Latvian parliament¹⁰ voting to withdraw from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence,¹¹ otherwise known as the Istanbul Convention, in October 2025. **Latvian President Edgars Rinkēvičs, however, refused to sign the withdrawal bill¹², stating that the withdrawal would damage Latvia's credibility within the European Union, set a dangerous precedent as the first time an EU member State leaves a human rights treaty, and could undermine the shared rule-of-law architecture that protects people's rights across Europe.** In addition, he stated that the government has not completed the necessary legal groundwork, creating potential gaps in protection for women and girls, and that any reconsideration of withdrawal should be left to the next *Saeima* (Latvia's parliament), following national elections in 2026. Re-consideration of the bill will most likely take place at the end of 2026, following parliamentary elections.

The President's decision followed sustained public protests¹³, petitions,¹⁴ statements from international legal bodies,¹⁵ appeals, and mobilisation by human rights organisations, alongside widespread national and regional opposition.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR) delivers two landmark legal opinions on the human right to care¹⁶ and the climate emergency¹⁷

On request from the government of Argentina, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights delivered a landmark Advisory Opinion¹⁸ in August 2025, affirming that the right to care is an autonomous human right under the American Convention on Human Rights, and formally recognising the disproportionate burden of care work placed on women, driven by gender stereotypes, which constitutes a form of structural discrimination. The IACHtR called on **States to recognise care as a human right** with three dimensions that impact the full lifecycle of a person:

- ◆ **The right to be cared for**, ensuring that all persons receive adequate, sufficient, quality care that fosters their dignity and autonomy;
- ◆ **The right to provide care**, recognising care work (paid or unpaid) as dignified work that must be done without discrimination, violence or precariousness and must not lead to poverty or a lack of social support;
- ◆ **The right to self-care**, protecting every individual's right to look after their own physical, mental and emotional welfare and to have access to time, resources and conditions that support their comprehensive development.

Importantly, this opinion sets the standard for States' obligations to enact protections and ensure a strong enforcement mechanism to address the gendered gaps in the care economy and labour force.

At the request of the Republics of Chile and Colombia, the IACtHR issued another landmark Advisory Opinion¹⁹ that reinforces States' human rights obligations to address climate change and protect life-supporting systems on earth. The opinion recognises that States must protect the climate as a critical part of their human rights obligations and declared the climate crisis a human rights emergency. **States are required to adopt measures such as banning activities "that irreversibly threaten the vital balance of interdependent ecosystems that enable the survival of present and future generations on a habitable planet."** The ruling takes an intersectional approach and recognises the disproportionate impact of the climate crisis on women, children and adolescents;

Indigenous peoples; Afro-descendant, peasant and fishing communities; older persons; human mobility; persons with disabilities; LGBTIQ+ individuals; and human rights defenders. In addition, it establishes specific obligations toward each of these groups, as well as for others who, although not belonging to these groups, are in a situation of vulnerability due to their context.

Legal reforms ending sex-based discrimination in the law

Kuwait's Penal Code

In *Words & Deeds* (2025)²⁰, we highlighted the State of Kuwait's Article 182 of Law No. 16 of 1960 (the Penal Code), which allowed perpetrators of abduction-related offences to evade criminal accountability by marrying their victims. In practice, this provision enabled impunity for sexual violence against women and girls and entrenched sex-based discrimination in the law. In 2025, Article 182 of the Penal Code was amended,²¹ among other positive legal reforms. **The amendment eliminates the possibility for perpetrators escaping punishment through marriage and represents an important step toward strengthening accountability for violence against women and girls.** The reform is explicitly grounded in Kuwait's international human rights obligations and its constitutional guarantees against discrimination in the law, making it a significant advancement for international human rights.

Human rights organisations, including Equality Now, have consistently called for the repeal of such laws, including Article 182, that perpetuate violence, inequality, and discrimination against women and girls.

Kyrgyzstan's Labour Code

Kyrgyzstan's labour code, in contradiction to its Constitution, discriminated on the basis of sex by prohibiting women from working in over 400 positions and labour sectors considered "heavy work and work with harmful or dangerous working conditions," a provision not applicable to men. The government adopted a new Labour Code²² in 2025, which **removed and amended sex-discriminatory restrictions, enacting equality before the law.** The advocacy for legal reform to eliminate all forms of sex-based discrimination in Kyrgyzstan's labour laws included litigation against these restrictions before the Constitutional Court of the Kyrgyz Republic in 2023.²³ The

reform could set the path for a safe work environment for all, instead of prohibiting access to employment on the basis of sex.

Iraq's Personal Status Law

Advocacy by Iraqi and international women's rights groups helped prevent statutory rollbacks to existing child marriage provisions, which set the minimum age to 18, with judicial exception. The law is still incompatible with international law and human rights standards, which set the minimum age at 18 without exceptions and recognise polygamy as discriminatory. The proposed amendments would have replaced the existing provision with the choice to follow religious family law with a reduced minimum age of marriage. This legal pluralism undermines the principle of equality before the law and risks deepening discrimination against women and girls by subjecting them to different rights and protections based on religious or sectarian affiliation.

In February 2025, the amendment to Iraq's Personal Status Law came into effect, allowing Muslim people in Iraq to choose between the Personal Status Law of 1959 (civil law) and a religious family law, both of which govern matters related to marriage, divorce, custody and inheritance, among others.²⁴ However, **the amendment requires that Article 8 of the Personal Status Law, which sets the minimum age of marriage at 18, with judicial exceptions allowing marriage from the age of 15, and the conditions under which polygamy is allowed under Article 3, not be contravened or weakened.** Women's rights organisations have warned that these safeguards are fragile in practice.

Malaysia's constitutional amendment

In March 2025, the Malaysian Government officially published a Constitutional amendment enacted by Parliament that gives women gender equal rights to confer citizenship on a child born abroad.²⁵ **This law will give Malaysia's 16.9 million²⁶ women and girls greater citizenship rights in line with the male population.** *A state of belonging - The right to equal citizenship: A decade of global action for gender-equal nationality laws (2014-2025)*²⁷ further shows nationality law reforms in 18 countries and a meaningful influence towards change in an additional 20 countries over the last decade through the work of the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights (GNCER) and partners.

Advocacy for legal reform continues

- ◆ **In November 2025, the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR) held a landmark hearing²⁸ in Miami, US, on the prevalence of female genital mutilation (FGM) in the region for the first time ever.** The IACHR Commissioners heard testimonies from survivors, Indigenous leaders, and medical and legal experts from Colombia, the United States, and Canada, who are calling for urgent, coordinated government action to prevent, study, and respond to this extreme form of violence against women and girls. The Commissioners recognised that the practice of FGM is not addressed adequately in the region and therefore requires attention.
- ◆ In Morocco, a new draft revised Mudawana (or Family Law)²⁹ incorporates several of the demands made by women's rights organisations. **The provisions include setting the minimum age of marriage at 18, with no exceptions, allowing divorced mothers who remarry to retain custody of their children, and securing the financial rights of wives (and the shared matrimonial wealth) following divorce or the death of the spouse.**
- ◆ In Egypt, building on the momentum of Young Women for Awareness, Agency, Advocacy and Accountability (YW4A) and the partnerships established with various women's rights organisations, a youth network was initiated to create a sustainable, youth-led advocacy structure that extends beyond the programme's lifecycle.³⁰ Grounded in feminist principles of intersectionality, inclusivity, solidarity and accountability, the emerging network will ensure that youth voices remain central to ongoing reform efforts in the country. **In addition, during YW4A's implementation in Palestine in 2025, young women have successfully engaged key government ministries in sustained advocacy.** For instance, a delegation of YW4A participants met with the Ministry of Justice to discuss the draft Family Protection from Violence Law, positioning themselves as informed partners in the legislative process. Through a technical committee that includes young women, civil society organisations, and the Palestinian Trade Union, **the Ministry of Labour is now developing a regulatory framework to combat workplace harassment.**
- ◆ Women's rights groups continue to shape normative and concrete developments in international law, with civil society organisations advocating for a gender-competent, intersectional approach to international law. For example, advocates have recommended that the debated draft Prevention and Punishment of Crimes Against Humanity treaty (CAH treaty)³¹ include provisions addressing violations that specifically affect women and girls, as UN Member States begin negotiations on the treaty's language in 2026.³²
- ◆ Regional conferences and meetings continue to build solidarity and momentum in the women's rights movement. For example, in August, 2025, the Member States of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), participating in the XVI Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean,³³ approved the Tlatelolco Commitment,³⁴ which establishes a Decade of Action to Achieve Substantive Gender Equality and the Care Society (2025-2035) in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Commitment sets a path to achieve substantive legal equality and a care society for the sustainability of life, people, and the planet.

Setbacks

Multilateral system under stress

As mentioned above, despite the UN Member States' legal obligation³⁵ to contribute to the organisation's regular and peacekeeping budgets, significant budget cuts³⁶ are planned across the UN system and its agencies, many of which operate globally and rely, to varying degrees, on Member State contributions. The financial strain on the UN has led to job losses,³⁷ heightened uncertainty,³⁸ and a scaling back of essential programming, including human rights and humanitarian initiatives worldwide. In addition, in January 2026, the US government issued a Presidential Memorandum³⁹ directing the withdrawal of the United States (financial or participatory) from 66 international organisations, including at least 31 UN agencies.

Meaningful engagement with multilateral forums often requires advocates, activists and other stakeholders to travel to the United Nations headquarters in the United States. This longstanding barrier has been further exacerbated over the past year by US government travel bans, highly militarised border policies, anti-migrant measures, and an increasingly hostile environment for human rights defenders. Taken together, these factors risk undermining the quality, inclusiveness, accessibility and effectiveness of multilateral systems and fora such as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

Dismantling of State institutions protecting women's rights

In several countries, specific ministries focused on women's empowerment and protection have been merged or moved under the direction of other government ministries, signalling a deprioritisation of women's rights. For example, as highlighted by the Observatory on the Backlash against Gender in Latin America and the Caribbean,⁴⁰ in 2025, the government of Panama⁴¹ announced that the Ministry of Women would be absorbed into the Ministry of Social Development. Similarly, Ecuador⁴² also merged the Ministry of Women and Human Rights with the Ministry of Government, which has broad responsibilities, reducing the visibility and focus on policies impacting women.⁴³

Rise of gender stereotypes and weaponisation of ‘family values’

Removing access to education on gender identity, and sexual and reproductive rights

Meant to target and end ‘gender ideology’ education, the President of Ecuador⁴⁴ signed a pledge in 2025 that guarantees that parents can educate their children based on their religion and convictions, without State interference. The Ministry of Education in Ecuador has also removed educational resources on comprehensive sexuality education with the stated purpose of opposing “indoctrination,” but could result in less access to sexual and reproductive health and rights and hinder discussions around “consent” based behaviours and laws.

African Bar Association’s model reservations to the African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (AU-CEVAWG)

In February 2025, the African Union adopted the Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (AU-CEVAWG)⁴⁵. While there are concerns⁴⁶ regarding the treaty, including from women’s rights organisations, the Convention recognises femicide, the role of men and boys in addressing violence against women, the important role of consulting stakeholders and adopting multi-sectoral strategies, and the urgent need to address violence against women and girls.

The Family Law Committee of the African Bar Association (ABA), which has been flagged⁴⁷ as an anti-rights group, issued a letter to African Heads of State advocating reservations to the Convention,⁴⁸ effectively pushing for a backsliding on the rights that do exist for women and girls. Specifically, the letter recommends reservations to disassociate from the language of sexual reproductive and health rights, which is inclusive of the LGBTIQ+ community. Further, the letter urges member States to reject the broad and inclusive definition of family and refuse to “recognize foreign misconceptions of non-traditional or alternative family forms (e.g., same-sex unions, non-marital cohabitation, etc.)” that they proclaim are “incompatible with the cultural or legal norms of African society.”

Restrictions on abortion rights and access to information in Puerto Rico

Recent legislative developments⁴⁹ have restricted the full exercise of women’s sexual and reproductive rights. Act 183-2025, by recognising legal personhood from conception, creates legal uncertainty regarding reproductive autonomy and decision-making related to pregnancy. Similarly, Act No. 166-2025, known as the *Keishla Madlane Act*, by extending criminal law protection from the moment of conception, reinforces a punitive approach to pregnancy that may significantly hinder timely access to reproductive health services. These measures increase the risk of disproportionate State intervention in women’s reproductive lives, with particularly adverse impacts on poor women and those facing violence or exclusion, in violation of international legal obligations to ensure equality and human rights.

The Governor of Puerto Rico also signed a new law⁵⁰ in December 2025 that amended the *Transparency and Expedited Procedure for Access to Public Information Act*. The development restricts the constitutional right to access public information⁵¹ and effectively weakens existing regulations. This legislative development will have a serious impact on access to official data on violence against women and femicides collected by law enforcement. Even prior to the enactment of the new law, there were significant challenges in collecting accurate data and properly identifying cases of femicide and violence against women. These challenges are expected to intensify under the new legal framework, particularly when combined with other measures, such as the dismantling of the Office of the Women’s Advocate and the removal of its dedicated division responsible for collecting and analysing gender-based violence data.

Building on the Calls to Action from the *Words & Deeds Update (2025)*⁵² the following are concrete steps that stakeholders, including governments, can take to build momentum and further counter the backlash against the rights of women and girls globally:

Recommendations

1. Support International and national civil society organisations

To counter backlash in a sustained, long-term, and resilient manner, while also being committed to building a movement for the protection and promotion of women's rights, there is a need for a strong civil society.

However, anti-rights campaigns are frequently accompanied by the repression of civil society organisations, advocates and human rights defenders. Such patterns are evident across all regions of the world. In these contexts, **international human rights organisations, centring and supporting national organisations, can play a critical role**, particularly where local and national actors face legal restrictions, intimidation, or State-sponsored attacks. Further, there is emerging evidence⁵³ that the anti-rights agenda is well-coordinated and well-funded.

Sustained movement-building requires **adequate resources**. Organisations at all levels must have the material capacity to respond effectively to gendered backlash. This underscores the need for **core funding**, alongside or instead of project-based funding, to ensure organisational stability and long-term impact. Support from funders, whether State or non-State, can enhance resilience and enable organisations to adopt creative and adaptive strategies in the face of evolving challenges. Additionally, where local organisations experience funding shortfalls, peer organisations can, with appropriate due diligence, provide support. Such solidarity contributes to **deeper, broader, and more resilient networks** for collective action.

2. Foster national, regional and cross-regional cooperation and collaboration

One effective strategy to counter various forms of repression and resource scarcity is **coalition-building**. Forming alliances among like-minded groups and extending beyond traditional partners enables the sharing of knowledge, expertise, strategies, and resources, both online and in person. These coalitions can include bar associations, legal aid organisations, ombudsman offices, civil society groups, women's rights experts, academics, students, the private sector, philanthropies, and other relevant stakeholders. **Diverse organisations that work on common issues and share experiences can build networks to collectively respond to backlash, thereby strengthening collective capacity and reach.**

Given the transnational, international and regional dimensions of violations of women's rights, there is a growing need for **cross-regional collaboration and shared learning**.⁵⁴ Strong national institutions are essential to facilitate the exchange of knowledge across regions, enabling women's rights advocates and individuals experiencing rights violations to access lessons and strategies that would otherwise take years to develop in isolation. At the same time, collective interventions at international forums can amplify advocacy efforts while reducing the risk of attracting targeted attention from national authorities.

The uneven development of backlash and rollback of rights requires cross-regional learning and solidarity more than ever. For example, women in the United States experiencing rollback of sexual and reproductive rights can learn from women's rights organisations in the Global South who have been developing strategies to systematically push back on inequality and systemic discrimination in similar areas of law and policy. These steps are made easier within coalitions and strategic alliances and are not dependent on ad hoc or urgent measures.

3. Adopt a comprehensive and multi-sectoral response

A successful response to the anti-rights agenda is rooted in efforts consistently recommended within a human rights framework. The implementation of a successful strategy to counter pushback lies in the **collective action of different sectors, decision-makers, institutions, and States**. Often, in an economic and social crisis, women's advancement is halted first. On the other hand, the backlash is not necessarily an exclusive and direct result of advancement in women's rights. Instead, there are deeply intertwined political, social and cultural reasons behind it, which must be addressed through an array of strategies.

For example, government departments that do not traditionally work on 'women's issues' must enact policies and strategies that can be resilient when faced with backlash. **Finance and budget considerations must be gender-competent and address social and economic concerns for women and girls to ensure that they are not subjected to harmful practices or forms of violence.** For instance, ensuring a robust social housing system can support single mothers or women escaping violence to be secure and safe, or ensuring long-term care can protect older women from economic violence. **Countering backlash, therefore, must not be undertaken solely by organisations or government entities focused on women's rights**, but instead be driven by a range of stakeholders with the power to implement a variety of creative and impactful policies.

4. Implement evidence-based proactive response

To effectively counter anti-rights movements and the promotion of harmful gender norms and practices, **there must be accessible, rights-based resources, institutions and services, grounded in evidence and informed by a holistic analysis of lived realities.**

Developing normative legal frameworks that reflect the lived realities of women and girls and propose concrete legal and policy solutions can help establish durable standards that advance a rights-based approach. For example, there are ongoing efforts, through multilateral conferences, high-level political interventions, social media and other platforms, to promote a patriarchal and restrictive conception of the “family,” reinforced by negative gender-based stereotypes. In contrast, families in reality can be diverse, same-sex, and must be formed by consent, personal autonomy and choice. A meaningful understanding of family must be grounded in existing family structures and lived experiences of women and girls, as well as in normative frameworks that prioritise equality, safety, dignity, and protection within the home.

In addition to normative standard-setting efforts, a proactive and comprehensive approach is needed to advance legal reform, advocacy, and strategic litigation. **Strategic litigation** undertaken to advance the rights of women and girls, when pursued in collaboration with media, civil society organisations, international organisations, national human rights institutions, and other stakeholders, can help establish a stronger and more sustainable foundation to address and withstand ongoing and future pushback against gender equality and women’s rights.

5. Support health and the right to care of women’s rights defenders

Defending the advances and gains achieved over recent decades, including through direct support, legal aid, service provision, advocacy and institution-building, requires significant and sustained capacity of women’s rights defenders. **Efforts to develop resilient institutional mechanisms, navigate complex legal and political systems, and address gender-based inequality and systemic discrimination are inherently demanding and resource-intensive.** These challenges are particularly acute in an underfunded and overburdened sector that is frequently treated as an afterthought in government action and policy-making. Further, there is a risk of retaliation and suppression, so developing legal protections addressing retaliation for defending human rights, at any stage, and bringing international attention to any acts of suppression, is necessary.

Accordingly, **sustained investment** is needed both in the lives of individuals experiencing sex- and gender-based discrimination and in those carrying out the work to ensure that the rights of women and girls are not subordinated to perceived competing interests. For States, any budgeting decisions must take into account the impact on gender justice. These actors must be supported and protected, including through recognition of their right to care, right to adequate standards of health, safety, and protection in the course of their work.

Conclusion

The Women, Business and the Law Report 2026 shows women have less than two-thirds of the legal rights available to men, and only 4% live in economies approaching full gender equality. There is no doubt, therefore, that many aspects of human rights implementation, multilateral systems, and legal frameworks require assessment, improvement, and systemic reform. However, such a **change must originate with, and be shaped by, the people most directly affected, and be grounded in the universal and inalienable nature of human rights.**

By contrast, **efforts to undermine the foundations of basic human rights, though they may gain temporary momentum from shifting social and political dynamics, are inherently unsustainable. The persistent efforts of women and girls, together with their allies, including in government and civil society, to assert the non-negotiable right to dignity and equality will continue to challenge these dynamics.** The success of efforts to counter the backlash ultimately depends on addressing the underlying reasons for the backlash, analysing the draw and appeal for lawmakers, underscoring the benefits of gender equality for all of society, especially during elections, and changing the political direction of countries. **Even in a fragmented global landscape, national, regional and international cooperation must continue, with the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of substantive equality remaining central objectives for all.**

Scan to read our previous update, *Global backlash against women's and girls' rights – Words and Deeds update September 2025*, launched in September 2025:



Scan to read the sixth edition in our Words and Deeds series, *Words and Deeds: Holding governments accountable in the Beijing+30 review process*, launched in March 2025:



Endnotes

- 1 <https://equalitynow.org/resource/reports/words-deeds-beijing30-report/>
- 2 <https://equalitynow.org/resource/briefs/global-backlash-against-women-and-girls-rights-words-and-deeds-update-2025/>
- 3 <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/wbl>
- 4 <https://www.reuters.com/world/un-chief-guterres-warns-imminent-financial-collapse-2026-01-30/>
- 5 <https://www.un.org/un80-initiative/en>
- 6 https://un80actions.un.org/?_gl=1*155mkv*_ga*MTQ4NjI4NzI5Ny4x-NzUxNTUyMzI0*_ga_TK9BQL5X7Z*czE3Njg5MjUwOTMkbzMlJGcx-JHQxNzY4OTI1NTAwIGoxMyRsMCRoMA.*_ga_S5EKZKSB78*czE3Njg5MjUwOTMkbzgzZkdE3Njg5MjU1NzEkajYwJGwwJGwv
- 7 https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2026-01/unfpa-unw_slide_deck_-_for_pre_meeting_sharing.pdf
- 8 <https://equalitynow.org/news/press-releases/central-african-republic-ratifies-the-maputo-protocol-becoming-the-46th-african-union-member-state-to-commit-to-advancing-womens-rights/>
- 9 <https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights-rights-women-africa>
- 10 <https://equalitynow.org/news/news-and-insights/the-istanbul-convention-is-not-a-threat-to-latvian-values-it-is-a-tool-to-realise-them-and-it-must-be-protected/>
- 11 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/council-of-europe-convention-on-preventing-and-combating-violence-against-women-and-domestic-violence>
- 12 https://www.president.lv/lv/jaunums/valsts-prezidents-ludz-saeimai-likumam-par-izstasanos-no-eiropas-padomes-konvencijas-par-vardarbibas-pret-sievietem-un-vardarbibas-gimene-noversanu-un-apkarosanu-otrreizēju-caurlukosanu?utm_source=https%3A%2F%2Feng.lsm.lv%2F
- 13 <https://www.euronews.com/2025/11/06/thousands-protest-against-latvias-potential-withdrawal-from-istanbul-convention>
- 14 <https://bnn-news.com/power-belongs-to-the-people-record-breaking-wave-of-signatures-in-latvia-on-the-istanbul-convention-273775>
- 15 <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/women/edvaw/stm-edvaw-latvia.pdf>
- 16 <https://equalitynow.org/news/news-and-insights/latin-america-and-the-caribbean-lead-the-way-in-recognising-care-as-a-human-right/>
- 17 <https://equalitynow.org/news/news-and-insights/for-the-first-time-the-inter-american-court-rules-on-the-climate-emergency-and-human-rights/>
- 18 http://corteidh.or.cr/OC-31-2025/index-eng.html?_cf_chl_tk=avZjfUNsDjz2wKdBaKvyEX6KTXbABIFQufh6VKI-YMEY-1767800606-1.0.1.1-qd1G3.nvaXzGNee.PWLjNF7H0Y_PcoDWb-mDgf_X8z48
- 19 <https://jurisprudencia.corteidh.or.cr/es/vid/1084981967>
- 20 Supra note 1
- 21 <https://www.arabtimesonline.com/news/laws-that-let-mothers-kill-newborns-and-kidnappers-escape-justice-scrapped/>
- 22 <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/3-45/edition/25298/ru>
- 23 <https://equalitynow.org/resource/kyrgyzstan-submission-to-kyrgyz-parliament-not-to-include-the-list-of-professions-prohibited-for-women-into-a-new-version-of-the-labour-code-june-2024/>
- 24 https://moj.gov.iq/upload/pdf/4814_compressed_701.pdf
- 25 <https://www.parlimen.gov.my/bills-dewan-rakyat.html?u-web=dr&lang=en>
- 26 Impact number based on World Bank female population data for Malaysia 2024: 16,939,879
- 27 <https://equalitynow.org/resource/reports/the-right-to-equal-citizenship-a-decade-of-global-action-for-gender-equal-nationality-laws-2014-2025/>
- 28 <https://equalitynow.org/news/press-releases/the-inter-american-commission-on-human-rights-holds-first-ever-hearing-on-female-genital-mutilation-in-the-americas/>
- 29 <https://www.newarab.com/news/morocco-govt-advances-family-code-reform-despite-controversy>
- 30 <https://equalitynow.org/news/press-releases/yw4a-partnership-focuses-on-strengthening-human-rights-for-young-women-in-egypt-kenya-palestine-and-south-sudan/>
- 31 https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/draft_articles/7_7_2019.pdf
- 32 <https://www.globaljusticecenter.net/advancing-gender-justice-in-the-crimes-against-humanity-convention-a-declaration/>
- 33 <https://conferenciamujer.cepal.org/16/en>
- 34 <https://lac.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2025/08/com-promiso-de-tlatelolco>
- 35 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/01/1166722>
- 36 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/09/1165850>
- 37 <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/various/the-office-of-the-high-commissioner-for-human-rights-has-cut-300-posts/90614111>
- 38 <https://press.un.org/en/2025/sqsm22867.doc.htm>
- 39 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2026/01/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-international-organizations-conventions-and-treaties-that-are-contrary-to-the-interests-of-the-united-states/>
- 40 <https://observabacklash.prigepp.org/georeferenciacion/>
- 41 <https://www.presidencia.gob.pa/publicacion/informe-a-la-nacion-dirigido-por-el-excelentisimo-senor-jose-raul-mulino-presidente-de-la-republica->
- 42 <https://www.primicias.ec/uploads/files/2025/07/24/DecretoMinisterios24julio2025.pdf>
- 43 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/12/un-experts-gravely-concerned-about-elimination-ministry-women-ecuador>
- 44 <https://www.comunicacion.gob.ec/presidente-daniel-noboa-suscribe-un-compromiso-publico-en-favor-de-la-ninez-con-la-organizacion-sociedad-y-familia/>
- 45 <https://achpr.au.int/sites/default/files/files/2025-05/en-au-convention-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-cevawg-27052025.pdf>
- 46 <https://fosfeminista.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/The-African-Union-Convention-on-Ending-Violence-Against-Women-and-Girls.pdf>
- 47 <https://www.ipas.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Anti-Rights-Groups-Take-Aim-at-Transnational-Trade-Agreement-ACPEUAE22b.pdf>
- 48 <https://afribar.org/model-reservations-to-the-au-cevawg/>
- 49 <https://www.impactmedia.com/nacion/puerto-rico/feminist-backlash-grows-against-puerto-rico-law-threatening-abortion-rights/>
- 50 <https://sutra.oslpr.org/SutraFiles/anejos/152452/Ley%20156-2025.pdf>

- 51 <https://ipi.media/puerto-rico-press-freedom-groups-warn-adoption-of-senate-bill-63-would-imperil-publics-access-to-information/>
- 52 <https://equalitynow.org/resource/briefs/global-backlash-against-womens-and-girls-rights-words-and-deeds-update-2025/>
- 53 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/12/turk-says-human-rights-under-attack-yet-undeterred-2025>
- 54 <https://equalitynow.org/news/news-and-insights/the-global-backlash-against-womens-rights-what-were-seeing-and-how-we-respond/>



A just world for all women and girls



equalitynow.org



programs@equalitynow.org



[@equality-now](https://www.linkedin.com/company/equality-now)