

Global factsheet



***Progress of the World's Women* is UN Women's flagship report that tracks progress on gender equality around the world. This factsheet provides a brief overview of the key data from the 2019-2020 *Families in a Changing World* report.¹**

1. GLOBAL SNAPSHOT

There is a great deal of diversity in family forms, influenced by global demographic trends and by social and economic change, including on gender relations. Overall, women are delaying marriage, with a small percentage opting not to marry. Child and early marriage remains a serious problem and adolescent birth rates remain high in a number of regions, particularly among those from the lowest-wealth quintile. The total fertility rate has decreased by almost half since 1970-1975 and family size is slowly declining in all regions. A number of discriminatory family laws cause and reinforce gender inequalities in marriage and the family while, despite notable legislative progress, violence against women and girls persists at astonishingly high levels. More than three in four women aged 15-49 married or in a union had their family planning needs satisfied by modern methods of contraception in 2015.² Globally, women's labour force participation rate declined slightly and women continued to have unequal access to income and assets. Women spend three times as much time doing unpaid care and domestic work as men do, limiting their opportunities for paid work, education and leisure time. Women comprise the majority of international migrants in a number of regions; however, their experiences and opportunities to live with their families depend on varying migration and reunification laws in the receiving countries.

2. FAMILIES ARE DIVERSE AND CHANGING

The report features a new extended global dataset on household composition that reveals the significant diversity in family structures and relationships—across regions, within countries and over time:³

- Households consisting of a couple with children, including young and adult offspring, account for 38.4 per cent of all households worldwide.⁴ When restricted to couples with at least one child below 18 years of age, the figure is 33.0 per cent.⁵
- The second most widespread household type (26.6 per cent) is the extended family household, which includes at least one adult and other relatives and may include children. Extended

households are most common in Sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Southern Asia (32.0 per cent in both regions) and less prevalent in Europe and Northern America (10.3 per cent).⁶

- The global share of lone-parent households is 7.5 per cent. Most of these households are led by women (84.3 per cent). Lone-mother households are most common in Latin America and the Caribbean (9.5 per cent).⁷
- Based on data from 89 countries and territories, there are at least 101.3 million lone mothers (living alone with their children) in the world. However, a remarkable diversity exists in the living arrangements of lone mothers: many do not live alone with their children but instead live in extended households. The number of lone mothers globally would likely double if lone mothers living in extended households were counted.⁸
- Households consisting of couples without children (12.9 per cent) and one-person households (12.5 per cent) are almost equally common worldwide. Europe and Northern America has the highest rates of couples without children (23.6 per cent) and one-person households (27.1 per cent).⁹
- Household size is slowly declining in all regions.¹⁰ In 2017, the global average household size was 3.7 persons, though it ranged widely from an average of 2.2 persons per household in the Netherlands and Norway to 8.3 persons in Senegal.¹¹

Marriage:

- Women worldwide have been delaying marriage, with their age of first marriage increasing from 21.9 years around 1990 to 23.3 years around 2010. Women marry earliest in Central and Southern Asia (20.8 years) and latest in Australia and New Zealand (30 years).¹²
- Over the past 25 years, the marriage rate for girls before the age of 18 declined worldwide from 25.0 to 20.8 per cent, and before the age of 15 from 7.1 to 5.0 per cent. However, this rate continues to be high today in Sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Southern Asia, where 37.2 per cent and 29.4 per cent, respectively, of women aged 20-24 are married or in a union before the age of 18.¹³

Non-marriage, cohabitation, divorce and separation:

- Globally, the share of never-married women aged 45-49 increased from 3.1 per cent around 1990 to 4.3 per cent around 2010. This rate was highest in Australia and New Zealand (14.1 per cent) and lowest in Central and Southern Asia (1.1 per cent).¹⁴
- Cohabitation is widespread in several regions: in Latin America and the Caribbean, in 2010, 73.9 per cent of women aged 25-29 in a union were cohabiting in Panama; 70.7 per cent in Uruguay; and 65.5 per cent in Argentina.¹⁵ In Europe and Northern America, the figures were 60.6 per cent in Estonia; 59.4 per cent in Denmark; 57.3 per cent in Iceland; and 57.2 per cent in France.¹⁶
- Over four decades, the proportion of divorced or separated women aged 45-49 has increased steadily, from 3.3 per cent around 1980 to 4.7 per cent around 2010. Average regional rates span 21.1 per cent in Australia and New Zealand to 1.4 per cent in Central and Southern Asia.¹⁷

Fertility:

- The current global total fertility rate is estimated at 2.4 live births per woman, almost half of the levels observed in 1970-1975 (4.4 live births). Projections show that by 2015-2020 the highest fertility rates are likely to be in Sub-Saharan Africa (4.7 live births) and the lowest will be in Europe and Northern America (1.7 live births).¹⁸
- Globally, based on data from 92 countries, women aged 20-24 from the poorest income group are 3.7 times more likely to give birth before the age of 18 than those in the richest income group.¹⁹
- Early pregnancy is most prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 27.8 per cent of women aged 20-24 give birth before age 18; this rate increases to 41.3 per cent among poor women.²⁰

Older persons:

- The global population is ageing. In 2019, people over the age of 60 account for about one eighth of the global population, which is expected to increase to about one fifth in 2050.²¹
- In 2017, women represented 54 per cent of those aged 60 years or over globally and more than 60 per cent of those above age 80.²²

3. LAWS ARE NEEDED THAT PROMOTE EQUALITY, RECOGNIZE FAMILY DIVERSITY AND PROHIBIT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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.

- Globally, the legal age of marriage for girls is 18 in all but four countries and territories;²³ yet nearly two thirds of countries and territories allow girls to be married earlier with parental or judicial consent.²⁴
- Between 2015 and 2017, among a set of 112 countries, 9 improved their laws on the minimum age for marriage, typically by eliminating such exceptions.²⁵
- In terms of women's equal rights and voice in marriage and the family, in 19 countries and territories (out of 189), the law explicitly requires women to obey their husbands; in 17 countries and territories, married women are not allowed to travel outside of the home in the same way as married men; and in 37 countries and territories, married women are not allowed to apply for a passport in the same way as married men.²⁶
- In 13 per cent of countries (based on a sample of 185 out of 189 countries), a married woman cannot confer citizenship on her children in the same way as a married man.²⁷
- Women's legal rights to initiate divorce and accumulate assets on the same terms as men are important for ensuring their exit options. In 2017, community marital property regimes of various kinds were in place in 51.3 per cent of the world's countries, while separation of property applied in 39.7 per cent of countries.²⁸

- Women often face disproportionate economic impacts from marriage and relationship dissolution and widowhood, particularly in countries where separation of property is practiced. Research in 91 low- and middle-income countries revealed the rate of extreme poverty among divorced/separated women (8 per cent) to be double the rate for divorced/separated men (3.9 per cent).²⁹
- In more than one in five countries, daughters and sons are treated unequally in laws governing inheritance;³⁰ and in 37 out of 183 countries, women and men do not have equal rights to inherit assets from their spouse.³¹ These inequalities are particularly stark in the Northern Africa and Western Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and in Central and Southern Asia.
- Wide variation exists in the legal recognition of cohabiting couples globally, with the most progress made in Australia and in some countries in Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean.³²

Same-sex partnerships:

- As of May 2019, 42 countries around the world have extended the right to marry or form a civil partnership to same-sex couples.³³
- Some 68 countries, however, have laws that explicitly criminalize by law consensual sexual relations between partners of the same sex, and in 11 of these such relations are punishable by death.³⁴

There has been progress on laws on violence against women, but lack of implementation remains a problem:

While only a handful of countries had laws to criminalize domestic violence in the early 1990s, data from 2018 shows that 76 per cent of countries (144 out of 189 countries and territories) now have such laws. Of the 45 countries that do not, 9 have aggravated penalties for specific types of abuse committed by spouses or family members.³⁵

- Furthermore, 75 per cent of countries and territories (141 out of 189) have laws that mandate the use of protection orders in cases of domestic violence.³⁶
- Nevertheless, some 30 per cent of women worldwide who have ever been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner over their lifetime.³⁷
- Globally, close to 18 per cent of ever-partnered women aged 15-49 have been subjected to intimate partner violence in the previous 12 months. Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) has the highest prevalence rate (34.7 per cent) while rates in Central and Southern Asia (23.0 per cent) and Sub-Saharan Africa (21.5 per cent) are also above the global average.³⁸
- In 2017, more than half (58 per cent) of all female victims of intentional homicide were killed by a family member, amounting to 50,000 deaths in the year or 137 women each day; and more than a third (30,000) of these were killed by their current or former intimate partner.³⁹
- The practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) has declined but persists at alarming levels: Around 2017, one in three girls aged 15 to 19 had been subjected to FGM in the 30 countries where the practice is concentrated, compared to nearly one in two around 2000.⁴⁰

- By 2018, 12 out of 185 countries and territories retained clauses in legislation exempting perpetrators of rape from prosecution when they are married to, or subsequently marry, the victim.⁴¹

4. HIGH QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES ARE CRITICAL FOR SUPPORTING FAMILIES AND GENDER EQUALITY

Public services, including reproductive health care and education, play a critical role in supporting families and advancing gender equality. Access to reproductive health care, in particular, is an essential foundation for women’s and girls’ ability to exercise voice and agency in decisions about family life.

- Globally, a far higher proportion of women aged 15-49 who were married or in a union and wanted to use a modern method of contraception were able to do so in 2015 (77.2 per cent) compared to 1970 (42.2 per cent).⁴²
- Of the estimated 55.7 million abortions that occurred worldwide each year between 2010 and 2014, just under half (or 25.1 million) were unsafe, of which 97 per cent were in developing countries.⁴³
- While difficult to quantify, unsafe abortion-related deaths are estimated to account for between 8 and 11 per cent of all maternal deaths worldwide.⁴⁴ This translates to 22,800-31,000 avoidable deaths each year.⁴⁵
- Evidence from 78 developing countries shows that educational attainment is related to increased age of marriage: Women aged 20-24 with secondary education are much less likely to have married before the age of 18 than those with primary or no education.⁴⁶

5. WOMEN’S ACCESS TO AN ADEQUATE, INDEPENDENT INCOME UNDERPINS THEIR RIGHTS WITHIN FAMILIES

For women, having their own resources—such as owning assets or receiving income from a paid job or through social protection—puts them 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 so choose. For older women, having their own income or assets is critical in securing an adequate standard of living.

Factors affecting women’s labour force participation rate:

- Globally, labour force participation rate (LFPR) for women aged 25-54 decreased from 64 per cent in 1998 to 63 per cent in 2018. The highest LFPR among women in 2018 was in Europe and Northern America (80 per cent) while the lowest was in Northern Africa and Western Asia (33 per cent).⁴⁷

- Women’s LFPR is affected by their marital status. In a sample of 93 countries, just 52.1 per cent of women aged 25-54 who are married or in a union are in the labour force compared to 65.6 per cent of single/never-married and 72.6 per cent of divorced/separated women.⁴⁸
- The LFPR for women who are married/in a union is particularly low in Central and Southern Asia (29.1 per cent) compared to the much higher rates in Europe and North America (78.2 per cent) and Sub-Saharan Africa (73.8 per cent).⁴⁹
- In contrast, the LFPR of men who are married or in a union is 96.1 per cent; for single/never married men it is 85.6 per cent.⁵⁰
- The presence of young children (under age 6) in the household also has an impact on women joining the work force globally and it decreases women’s labour force participation by 5.9 percentage points. The opposite is true for men in households with young children as men’s labour force participation increases by 3.4 percentage points.⁵¹ This gap indicates a striking “motherhood employment penalty”.⁵²
- Similarly, research in high-income countries shows that women who are mothers bear a significant penalty in terms of wages, while for most men, fatherhood results in a wage ‘bonus’.⁵³
- Women living with children aged 0-5 years have the lowest employment rates (47.6 per cent) compared not only to fathers of young children (87.9 per cent) but also to both non-fathers (78.2 per cent) and non-mothers (54.4 per cent).⁵⁴

Lone-mother households experience high rates of poverty:

- Based on data from 40 high and upper middle-income countries with harmonized data, lone-mother households with young children have higher rates of poverty when compared to dual-parent households with young children across every country. Rates and magnitude of this difference in poverty rates varies substantially: Luxembourg stands out with the largest percentage point difference (50.4), followed by Czechia (42.4), Canada (40.0) and the United States (37.2).⁵⁵

6. FAMILIES NEED TIME, MONEY AND SERVICES TO PROVIDE CARE

Families are sites of care where children are nurtured and older people are supported. They need support from governments to do this vital work, and this is best provided through time (maternity and parental leaves), money (social transfers to families with young children as well as pensions) and services (high-quality care services for children and older persons).

Women do the majority of unpaid care work, and form the majority of the global care workforce:

- Globally, women do three times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men do, though gender inequalities vary across countries and are particularly stark in developing country contexts.⁵⁶
- Time-use surveys from around the world reveal that when paid and unpaid work are combined, women work longer hours overall than men do.⁵⁷

- Rural residence tends to further increase the time women allocate to unpaid domestic work.⁵⁸ This may, in part, be due to lack of infrastructure and time-saving technologies. Survey data for 61 countries show that in 80 per cent of households without water on premises, women and girls are responsible for water collection.⁵⁹
- The gender gap in unpaid care and domestic work is at its widest in the Northern Africa and Western Asia region, where the median female-to-male ratio is almost six.⁶⁰
- In all countries, almost all institutional long-term care (LTC) for older persons and those living with disabilities is provided by women, while foreign-born workers make up anywhere between 20 per cent (in Sweden) to 70 per cent (in Italy) of the LTC workforce.⁶¹
- According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the current global care workforce amounts to 381 million workers or 11.5 per cent of total global employment.⁶² Two thirds of this workforce, or 249 million workers, are women, making up 19.3 per cent of global female employment.⁶³ This means that nearly 1 in 5 women is employed by the care sector.
- Globally, only 41.1 per cent of mothers with new-borns receive a maternity benefit, with large variations across regions; in Africa, less than 16 per cent of childbearing women are effectively covered.⁶⁴
- Pre-primary education, which in most countries starts at 3 years of age, has fairly low coverage rates in developing countries, reaching 39 per cent on average in 2014 compared to 87 per cent in developed countries.⁶⁵
- Across a range of developing countries, children aged 3 to 5 in the richest households are almost six times more likely to attend an early childhood education programme than children from the same age group in the poorest households.⁶⁶

7. POLICIES AND REGULATIONS SHOULD SUPPORT MIGRANT FAMILIES AND PROTECT WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Migration is a major force affecting families and women's enjoyment of rights within them. While it 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 they can live together or apart.

- In 2017, international migrants made up 3.4 per cent of the global population, equating to approximately 257.7 million international migrants,⁶⁷ a figure that includes 25.4 million refugees and 3.1 million asylum seekers.⁶⁸
- Overall, international migration has remained relatively stable since the 1950s, with the total number of international migrants fluctuating between 2.5 and 3.5 per cent of the world's population.⁶⁹
- Most recent estimates suggest that there are at least 762.6 million internal migrants worldwide, indicating that internal migrants exceed the number of international migrants by approximately three times.⁷⁰

- In 2017 alone, 16.2 million people were forcibly displaced from their homes by persecution, climate-related disaster, protracted conflict and other types of violence, a record-breaking figure for the fifth year in a row.⁷¹ The majority of these (11.8 million) were internally displaced.⁷²
- In 2017, women made up just under half (48.4 per cent) of the total number of people living in a country different from that of their birth.⁷³
- Women comprise 50 per cent or more of all international migrants in three regions: Australia and New Zealand, Europe and Northern America and Latin America and the Caribbean.⁷⁴
- Countries' policies on family reunification vary widely. According to the Migration Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), Sweden has the most favourable policies toward migrant families (based on a sample of 45 countries), followed by Portugal and Spain.

8. FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES ARE AFFORDABLE

Analysis commissioned for the report shows that most countries can afford a package of family-friendly policies.⁷⁵ This package would guarantee that every member of society has access to basic income security and essential health care over the life cycle and would ensure that pre-school children and older adults can access quality care services.

- The analysis finds that to close income, health and care gaps, 41 out of 155 countries could implement the required policies for less than 3 per cent of GDP and just over half (79 countries) could do so for less than 5 per cent of GDP.
- For one fifth of countries (35) included in the study, these policies would cost more than 10 per cent of GDP, which would require additional external support to achieve, including official development assistance (ODA).⁷⁶
- The implementation of these policies would benefit all members of society but would have particularly important impacts for women, who are more likely to live in poor households, face specific life-course contingencies (notably maternity and greater longevity) and take on a highly disproportionate share of unpaid care work.

¹ For regional groupings, see Annex 8 of the report.

² UN Women calculations from UN DESA 2018b and UN DESA 2018c. See Figure 3.3 in Chapter 3.

³ Created through a collaboration between UN Women and UN DESA Population Division.

⁴ 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. This analysis covers 86 countries and territories comprising 78.5 percent of the world's population, based on latest available data from 2007 onwards.

⁵ Regional aggregates are UN Women calculations from country-level estimates from UN DESA 2017m, UN DESA 2018a and UN DESA and UN Women 2019. This analysis covers 88 countries and territories comprising 61.3 percent of the world's population, based on latest available data from 2007 onwards. As the estimates for the global average are based in less than two thirds of their respective population, it should be treated with caution. See Figure 2.10 in Chapter 2.

⁶ Regional values calculated by UN Women using published country-level estimates from UN DESA 2018a. For this analysis, data on China are based on estimates produced and published in Hu and Peng 2015. See Figure 2.2 in Chapter 2. For this analysis, estimates for Europe and Northern America should be treated with caution as it is based on less than two-thirds of their respective regional population (41.0 per cent).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ UN Women calculations based on published country-level estimates from the UN DESA 2018a; Hu and Peng 2015. The analysis covers 89 countries and territories comprising 80.0 percent of the world's population. Population estimates are based on 2017 revision of the World Population Prospects.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ UN DESA 2017b.

¹¹ UN Women calculations from country-level estimates from UN DESA 2017m, UN DESA 2018a and UN DESA and UN Women 2019.

¹² Regional aggregates are UN Women calculations from country-level estimates published in UN DESA 2017k and UN DESA 2017m. See Figure 2.3 in Chapter 2.

¹³ UNICEF 2019b global databases, based on Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and other nationally representative sources, 2011-2018.

¹⁴ Regional aggregates are UN Women calculations from country-level estimates published in UN DESA 2017k and UN DESA 2017m. See Figure 2.5 in Chapter 2.

¹⁵ Esteve et al. 2016.

¹⁶ Regional aggregates are UN Women calculations from country-level estimates published in UN DESA 2017k and UN DESA 2017m.

¹⁷ Ibid. See Figure 2.7 in Chapter 2.

¹⁸ Regional aggregates are UN Women calculations from estimates published in UN DESA 2017m. See Figure 2.8 in Chapter 2.

¹⁹ UN Women calculations from ICF International 2007-2017, Demographic and Health Surveys and UNICEF (various years), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys. See Figure 2.9 in Chapter 2.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ UN DESA. 2019.

²² UN DESA 2017l.

²³ Based on 170 countries and territories. Additionally, in 6 countries and territories (out of 186) the legal age of marriage is under age 18 for boys. Data on girls for 5 out of these 6 countries and territories are unavailable. UN Women calculations from the World Bank 2018e.

²⁴ Sakhonchik et al. 2015.

²⁵ Tavares and Wodon 2018, p. 3.

²⁶ World Bank 2019c.

²⁷ UN Women calculations using data from the World Bank 2018e. A subset of 185 countries was used, instead of the full sample of 189.

²⁸ UN Women calculations using data from the World Bank 2018d.

²⁹ UN Women and World Bank forthcoming.

³⁰ UN Women calculations using data from the World Bank 2018e. A subset of 185 countries was used, instead of the full sample of 189.

³¹ UN Women calculations using data from the World Bank 2018e.

³² See Chapter 3

³³ Ramón Mendos 2019.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ UN Women calculations based on World Bank 2018e.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ WHO et al. 2013.

³⁸ UNSD 2018. See Figure 6.2 in Chapter 6. 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.

³⁹ UNODC 2018.

⁴⁰ UN General Assembly 2018a.

⁴¹ World Bank 2018e.

⁴² UN Women calculations from UN DESA 2018b and UN DESA 2018c.

⁴³ Ganatra et al. 2017.

⁴⁴ Special tabulations of data from Say et al. 2014, cited in Singh, Remez et al. 2017, p. 33.

⁴⁵ Singh, Remez et al. 2017

⁴⁶ UNFPA 2012. See also: Field and Ambrus 2008.

⁴⁷ Weighted averages calculated by UN Women using data from ILO 2018c and UN DESA 2017m. See Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4.

⁴⁸ UN Women calculations based on data from ILO 2018b, LIS various years and ABS 2016b.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ ILO 2018a.

⁵² ILO 2019b.

⁵³ Budig and England 2001; Budig 2014.

⁵⁴ ILO 2019b, Figure 2.25.

⁵⁵ Nieuwenhuis et al. 2018.

⁵⁶ Based on average differences in female/male unweighted means. UN Women calculations based on UNSD 2018.

⁵⁷ Based on average differences in female/male unweighted means.

⁵⁸ ILO 2018a.

⁵⁹ WHO and UNICEF 2017.

⁶⁰ UN Women calculations based on UNSD 2018.

⁶¹ Scheil-Adlung 2015, Table 4.

⁶² The care workforce includes care workers in care sectors (education, health and social work), care workers in other sectors, domestic workers and non-care workers in care sectors who support care service provision. ILO 2018a, p. xxxviii.

⁶³ ILO 2018a.

⁶⁴ ILO 2017e, Figure 3.5, p. 32.

⁶⁵ UNESCO 2016, Annex Table 4.

⁶⁶ UNESCO 2016.

⁶⁷ UN DESA 2017c.

⁶⁸ UNHCR 2018a.

⁶⁹ De Haas et al. 2018.

⁷⁰ UN DESA 2013a.

⁷¹ UNHCR 2018a.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ UN DESA 2017c.

⁷⁴ UN DESA 2017j.

⁷⁵ Bierbaum and Cichon forthcoming.

⁷⁶ Ibid.