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WORLD: The rocky road to gender equality: Are women better off now than in 1970?

By Kristyna Foltinova

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RFERL (13.04.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3q1kuly> - Fifty years ago, women had, on average, less than half the legal rights of men. In many countries, they weren't allowed to work in industrial jobs and there was no law protecting them against gender-based discrimination

at work. Paid leave for mothers was offered in just a few countries and legislation addressing domestic violence was practically nonexistent.

Over the past few decades, many countries have made reforms toward greater gender equality, but despite this progress, women still face regulations that restrict their economic opportunities. Let's have a look at what has changed from 1970 till today.

Gender equality 50 years ago and now

The Women, Business, And The Law Index issued by the World Bank ranks countries based on their legislation and regulations that affect women's economic opportunities. The index consists of eight indicators (such as mobility, pay, and pensions), which are structured around the life cycle of a working woman. The higher the score, the more gender-equal the legislation is.

In 1970, the global index was 46.3 points out of 100 -- meaning that, on average, women had less than half the legal rights of men. The biggest inequalities were observed in the areas of parenthood, the workplace, and pay.

Over subsequent decades, the index gradually increased and eventually reached 76.1 points in 2020. According to the latest report, parenthood and pay were still the areas where the biggest inequalities were found, and the World Bank considers only 10 countries in the world to be fully gender-equal.

Read full article [here](#).

WORLD/UNICEF: Joining forces to develop a research agenda on intersections of violence against children and women

By Aník Gevers, Elizabeth Dartnall, Alessandra Guedes, and Claudia García-Moreno

UNICEF (07.04.2021) – <https://bit.ly/3txkzqf> - There is growing global recognition of the intersections between violence against women and violence against children. Currently there is insufficient interaction between these fields, and evidence on interventions to address these linkages is limited. It is vital to identify knowledge/evidence gaps to address the intersections of these two forms of violence in order to strengthen prevention and response programming to achieve the best outcomes for both women and children.

To address this need, the Sexual Violence Research Initiative ([SVRI](#)), [UNICEF Innocenti](#), and the Special [Programme](#) on Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction (HRP) hosted by WHO are joining efforts to develop a global research agenda on the intersections between violence against women and violence against children. The new research agenda will contribute to building knowledge in a more systematic way, ensure that research efforts make the best use of limited resources, and serve to monitor progress over time. It will also inform the implementation of the multiagency [RESPECT Women](#) and [INSPIRE](#) frameworks, support UNICEF's [commitment](#) to respond to the gender dimensions of violence, [SRVI Grant-making](#) and promote coherence in the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development [Goals](#).

Historically, research agendas have been largely driven by researchers with limited input from other stakeholders. To promote participation and minimize the risks of bias, we are proposing to adapt the Child Health and Nutrition Research Initiative [method](#) and use

online surveys and meetings to reach a wide group of stakeholders. SVRI, UNICEF Innocenti and WHO/HRP together make up the Coordinating Group which will implement this effort. An Advisory Group will help develop the framework and provide technical input and guidance throughout the process. Finally, a broad group of Global Stakeholders – including researchers, advocates, policy-makers, and practitioners representing different countries, settings, disciplines and areas of focus – will provide inputs and promote dissemination and implementation of the final research agenda widely.

Collaborative Approach

The initiative will build on lessons learned through collaboration with the Global Shared [Research Agenda](#) on Violence against Women and Girls, led by SVRI and the [Equality Institute](#), with participation of UNICEF Innocenti and the WHO, among others. Close collaboration among these processes will promote complementarity of the initiatives.

A stepwise approach to identifying research priorities for the intersections of violence against women and violence against children involves five broad phases (See <https://bit.ly/3dtei9t>).

In partnership with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine's [Gender Violence and Health Centre](#), two systematic reviews are underway that will identify research gaps in the published literature. These reviews focus on: The [co-occurrence of intimate partner violence](#) and child maltreatment: a systematic review of the common contributing factors and on [interventions that address](#) both child maltreatment and intimate partner violence in a coordinated way. In addition, other relevant systematic reviews will be identified.

The Coordinating and Advisory groups will develop a framework to guide a prioritisation process. Global Stakeholders will be invited to rank research priorities and provide additional inputs. The outcomes of these processes will be collated and analysed to identify research questions deemed to be of priority by the field. The Advisory Group will provide oversight of the analysis and results before they are widely disseminated, including through Global Stakeholder network.

Moving forward together

Researchers, practitioners, activists and donors from both the violence against women and violence against children fields are recognizing that collaboration and increased coherence in programming are essential to meet women's, adolescents', and children's needs, and to maximise synergies. Therefore, rather than focusing on research priorities for women or children separately, this initiative will specifically target gaps in knowledge on the intersections between these different but related forms of violence.

A consultative, inclusive process among violence against women and violence against children stakeholders will identify areas where research can enhance coordination, alignment and consistency. The process, as much as the outcomes, will help strengthen both fields and build bridges for the benefit of children and women everywhere.

If you would like to join the Global Stakeholders, please [sign up](#) and we will include you in the database. All are welcome.

For more information about this research priority setting process, please contact Anik Gevers (SVRI) at anik@svri.org

Important links

- [Violence Against Women and Violence Against Children - The Points of Intersection \(PPT\)](#)
 - [Bridging the Gaps: Reviewing the intersections of violence against women and violence against children \(Event\)](#)
 - [Promoting an understanding of the intersection between violence against women and children \(Event\)](#)
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INDIA: 'Pay up': Indian trafficking victims left destitute by compensation delays

Hit by COVID-19 delays, some 12,000 survivors of trafficking, sexual assault and acid attacks are waiting for claims to be assessed

By Anuradha Nagaraj

Thomson Reuters Foundation (06.04.2021) - After being trafficked for sex as a girl of 16, Malika hoped that government compensation would get her back on her feet - but the young mother is now jobless, living on the streets and 200,000 Indian rupees (\$2,727) in debt.

Despite being awarded 150,000 rupees in compensation in 2019, Malika is among thousands of women survivors of trafficking, sexual assault and acid attacks waiting for payment since the COVID-19 pandemic struck last year.

"We are living in an open ground with a plastic sheet over our heads," the 20-year-old mother of two, who declined to give her full name, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone from her makeshift shelter in India's West Bengal state.

"I applied for victim compensation to build a better life but I am living a terrible one instead," she said, adding that her husband had travelled to look for odd jobs, leaving her with the children who kept falling ill.

Malika said creditors regularly hounded her to repay loans she has taken to feed her children but when the compensation does arrive, it will not even clear her debts.

There were more than 400,000 cases of crimes against women and girls in 2019, government data shows, with sexual assault, rape and domestic violence being the most common.

India has a scheme to compensate women and girls who survive sexual assault, acid attacks and trafficking, but only a fraction receive compensation due to low awareness of the scheme and the high burden of proof required, studies show.

Government data shared with the Thomson Reuters Foundation shows that more than 12,000 women and girl survivors of these crimes were waiting to have their applications for compensation assessed in January, up from about 11,000 in 2019.

West Bengal State Legal Services Authority, which is responsible for paying compensation to survivors like Malika, had "exhausted funds by March 2020 and had just 5,000 rupees in the account", said its member secretary Raju Mukherjee.

"We could do nothing, make no payments," said Mukherjee, whose state has among the highest number of trafficking survivors in India. "But we have recently received funds ... and are trying to expedite the process now."

NO MONEY

Women's rights campaigners have long complained that the compensation scheme is too slow, with survivors waiting years to testify in court to determine the size of their award, while state authorities often run short of funds.

This cumbersome process has been exacerbated during the pandemic, said Ashok Jain, member secretary for the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), the umbrella body for all of the state level authorities that make payments to survivors.

With courts functioning at limited capacity, survivors unable to travel to follow up on cases and priority shifting to containing the pandemic, compensation applications were not cleared and money was not dispersed, legal aid officials said.

"Many acid attack survivors had to stop their ongoing treatment during the pandemic as compensation was not coming through," said Dibyaloke Rai Chaudhuri, coordinator for Acid Survivors and Women Welfare Foundation.

Part compensation needs to be paid within 15 days of the application being cleared, Chaudhuri said, adding that the need for money was most urgent in the initial days, particularly for medical treatment.

NALSA said that the sums offered do take into account the severity of trauma, physical harm, medical expenses, loss of education, employment and financial condition of the survivor.

Frustrated that one of his clients - a child who had been sexually abused - had waited two years for 40,000 rupees in compensation, lawyer Zishaan Iskandari filed a petition in the Delhi High Court last June, during a two-month lockdown.

"It was a migrant family who literally had a hand-to-mouth existence and could not even go back to their village," said Iskandari, who provides legal aid to charity HAQ Centre for Child Rights.

"It had been two years since the compensation was awarded and I had at least 25 similar cases. It took a court order for the Delhi Legal Services Authority to release the money within 48 hours."

Across states, lawyers and charities said that routine checks by legal services authorities before clearing a compensation application is a slow process that was practically halted during the pandemic, with state cash flows badly hit.

"Survivors ... are often from the most marginalised communities. How can you tell them there is no money?" asked Iskandari.

"PAY UP"

While COVID-19 infections and deaths have fallen since their peak in September, coronavirus cases are on the rise in India, which has recorded more than 160,000 deaths - the fourth highest globally after the United States, Brazil and Mexico.

Survivor networks have urged state governments to step up support during the pandemic as stigma makes it even harder for survivors to get jobs or financial aid amid massive job losses.

"Very few (survivors) are aware of the compensation scheme and actually apply for it," said Ram Mohan, secretary of anti-trafficking charity HELP, which supports survivors, mostly poor women and children lured by promises of work.

"Those who do, wait endlessly. But the wait during the pandemic was probably the longest for many because there were no jobs and no other source of income."

The hardship suffered by survivors during the pandemic has sparked fresh calls for reform of the compensation system, with women's rights campaigners calling for faster, more generous payments.

"Survivors are becoming more aware, demanding their rights," said Amina Khatun Laskar, secretary of anti-trafficking NGO Bansra Birangana Seva Samity.

"The system is not supporting them. They cannot afford these delays and (states) need to pay up."

(\$1 = 73.3510 Indian rupees)

EU: Pay transparency directive – a milestone in closing the gender pay gap?

European Women's Lobby (19.03.2021) - <https://bit.ly/39VC8IS> - The European Women's Lobby (EWL) welcomes the recently adopted legislative proposal on pay transparency by the European Commission, which has been long overdue. While there are many positive measures in the proposal including a definition of 'work of equal value', the EWL regrets that mandatory reporting on the gender pay gap only concerns companies with 250 workers, which excludes many sectors where women work, particularly in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs).

We welcome the measures to facilitate the right of workers to access information to assess whether they are being discriminated against in comparison with other workers in a similar position. The EWL particularly welcomes reference to the concept of 'work of equal value', which provides some clarity in order to define how this can be established within companies and especially across sectors. Furthermore, we welcome measures calling for 'gender neutral objective criteria' to compare and determine the value of work. It is crucial that this includes people-related skills and responsibilities in establishing this criteria and ultimately in the transposition of the directive.

This is crucial to close gender gaps in the labour-market which remains highly gender-segregated and in which women are concentrated in a limited number of specific people-centred sectors, such as health, care, education, retail, - sectors that are characterised by poor pay, less favourable working conditions and high levels of part-time work. As such, this new legislative proposal must complement the legal framework on part time work concluded by the Social Partners in 1997 1, which clearly states that part-time work should be 'voluntary', 'non-discriminatory' with no 'less favourable conditions', and provide the possibility to 'transfer from/back to full-time/part-time'. In line with the measures outlined in the pay transparency legislative proposal, it is urgent to monitor the application of the part time work framework, to ensure that wages are in line with the full time equivalent to address the gender pay gap in part time occupations.

For the EWL, the proposed directive is an important milestone in closing the gender pay gap and in particular in recognising the intersectional axes of discrimination on the basis of sex, ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. However, the

EWL questions whether this legal instrument is enough to address the long-term persistent and structural dimensions of inequality between women and men, which are related to gender stereotypes and mirrored in the labour-market. Pay transparency alone will not address the deep-rooted gender inequalities, but it is a first step in the right direction. An encompassing legislative and policy framework at EU level is necessary to close the gender pay gap, and address the gender lifelong earnings, pension and subsequent poverty gaps.

Additional necessary measures include mandatory pay audits in all companies, regardless of the size of the workforce. Women working in SMEs and/or smaller structures where neither human resources and/or trade unions are present should also be able to provide mandatory pay audits and receive technical support to do this. All companies should establish mandatory gender action plans, including transparency in pay composition and other measures to address the gender pay gap and that is monitored annually.

TURKEY withdraws from European treaty protecting women

By Zeynep Bilginsoy

AP News (20.03.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3skPOPn> - Turkey withdrew early Saturday from a landmark European treaty protecting women from violence that it was the first country to sign 10 years ago and that bears the name of its largest city.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's overnight decree annulling Turkey's ratification of the Istanbul Convention is a blow to women's rights advocates, who say the agreement is crucial to combating domestic violence. Hundreds of women gathered in Istanbul to protest against the move on Saturday.

The Council of Europe's Secretary General, Marija Pejčinović Burić, called the decision "devastating."

"This move is a huge setback to these efforts and all the more deplorable because it compromises the protection of women in Turkey, across Europe and beyond," she said.

The Istanbul Convention states that men and women have equal rights and obliges state authorities to take steps to prevent gender-based violence against women, protect victims and prosecute perpetrators.

Some officials from Erdogan's Islam-oriented party had advocated for a review of the agreement, arguing it is inconsistent with Turkey's conservative values by encouraging divorce and undermining the traditional family unit.

Critics also claim the treaty promotes homosexuality through the use of categories like gender, sexual orientation and gender identity. They see that as a threat to Turkish families. Hate speech has been on the rise in Turkey, including the interior minister who described LGBT people as "perverts" in a tweet. Erdogan has rejected their existence altogether.

Women's groups and their allies who have been protesting to keep the convention intact immediately called for demonstrations across the country Saturday under the slogan "Withdraw the decision, implement the treaty." They said their years-long struggle would not be erased in one night.

Rights groups say violence against and killing of women is on the rise in Turkey but the interior minister called that a “complete lie” on Saturday.

A total of 77 women have been killed since the start of the year, according to the We Will Stop Femicide Platform. Some 409 women were killed in 2020, with dozens found dead under suspicious circumstances, according to the group.

Numerous women’s rights groups slammed the decision. Advocacy group Women’s Coalition Turkey said the withdrawal from a human rights agreement was a first in Turkey. “It is clear that this decision will further encourage the murderers of women, harassers, rapists,” their statement said.

Turkey’s justice minister said the government was committed to combating violence against women.

“We continue to protect our people’s honor, the family and our social fabric with determination,” Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gul tweeted.

Erdogan has repeatedly stressed the “holiness” of the family and called on women to have three children. His communications director, Fahrettin Altun, said the government’s motto was ‘Powerful Families, Powerful Society.’”

Many women suffer physical or sexual violence at the hands of their husbands or partners, but up-to-date official statistics are unavailable. The Istanbul Convention requires states to collect data.

Hundreds of women and allies gathered in Istanbul, wearing masks and holding banners. Their demonstration has so far been allowed but the area was surrounded by police and a coronavirus curfew is begins in the evening.

They shouted pro-LGBT slogans and called for Erdogan’s resignation. They cheered as a woman speaking through a megaphone said, “You cannot close up millions of women in their homes. You cannot erase them from the streets and the squares.”

Turkey was the first country to sign the Council of Europe’s “Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence” at a committee of ministers meeting in Istanbul in 2011. The law came into force in 2014 and Turkey’s constitution says international agreements have the force of law.

Some lawyers claimed Saturday that the treaty is still active, arguing the president cannot withdraw from it without the approval of parliament, which ratified the Istanbul Convention in 2012.

But Erdogan gained sweeping powers with his re-election in 2018, setting in motion Turkey changing from a parliamentary system of government to an executive presidency.

The justice minister wrote on Twitter that while parliament approves treaties which the executive branch puts into effect, the executive also has the authority to withdraw from them.

Women lawmakers from Turkey’s main opposition party said they will not recognize the decree and called it another “coup” on parliament, which had unanimously accepted the treaty, and a usurpation of the rights of 42 million women.

UK: Four-fifths of young women in the UK have been sexually harassed, survey finds

Exclusive: YouGov poll reveals extent of abuse and lack of faith in authorities' ability to deal with it

By Alexandra Topping

The Guardian (10.03.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3shlz0W> - A UN Women UK survey found 80% of women of all ages said they had experienced sexual harassment in public spaces.

More than four-fifths of young women in the UK have been subjected to sexual harassment, according to a survey for UN [Women](#) UK, which warns that most women have lost faith that the abuse will be dealt with.

Among women aged 18-24, 86% said they had been sexually harassed in public spaces, while just 3% did not recall ever having experienced sexually harassing behaviour. The remaining 11% chose not to answer the question.

According to the survey, published in a [report by the all-party parliamentary group \(APPG\) for UN Women](#), 71% of women of any age said they had experienced sexual harassment in public spaces.

"This is a human rights crisis. It's just not enough for us to keep saying 'this is too difficult a problem for us to solve' – it needs addressing now," said Claire Barnett, executive director of UN Women UK.

"We are looking at a situation where younger women are constantly modifying their behaviour in an attempt to avoid being objectified or attacked, and older women are reporting serious concerns about personal safety if they ever leave the house in the dark – even during the daytime in winter."

The survey of more than 1,000 women, carried out by YouGov and seen exclusively by the Guardian, exposes a damning lack of faith in the UK authorities' desire and ability to deal with sexual harassment – 96% of respondents did not report incidents, with 45% saying it would not change anything. Among those who said the event was not serious enough to report were women who had been groped, followed and coerced into sexual activity, said UN Women UK.

As part of the [UN Women UK's Safe Spaces Now](#) project, the organisation collected stories from 400 women and sent an [open letter to leaders](#), calling for better designed public spaces, improved reporting systems and education.

"We've seen really strong results elsewhere in the world. Our problem now is that sometimes in the UK, we think we are a leading light in terms of progress, and we forget to work on the gender-based violence that still happens every day at home, especially to women and marginalised groups," said Barnett.

Laura Bates, founder of the Everyday Sexism Project, said women were recognising the abuse they faced as sexual harassment, but it was unsurprising they had no faith in an "utterly broken" system.

"If you talk about wolf-whistling or street harassment in the UK, you are liable to find yourself on the front page of a tabloid being called a 'feminazi' and accused of overreacting, so of course young women don't think that they'll be taken seriously if they come forward," she said.

Bates pointed to [TUC/Everyday Sexism research](#) that found 52% of women had experienced [sexual harassment at work](#), and of the one in five who had reported it, three-quarters said nothing had changed, while 16% said they were treated worse as a result.

"At the root of all this is the normalisation of the idea that a woman's body in a public place is simply public property and young women just have to put up with it. We have to shatter that normalisation through policy and in the press if we want to change the picture," she said.

Note: This article was amended on 24 March 2021. Due to incorrect information supplied to us, an earlier version said the UN Women UK survey found that 97% of women aged 18-24 had reported being sexually harassed in public spaces, and 80% of all women; these figures are actually 86% and 71% respectively. The headline has also been amended to reflect this updated text.

USA: Hundreds of women unite to protest against Biden's transgender executive order, Equality Act

By Brandon Showalter

The Christian Post (09.03.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3eozApz> - A diverse coalition of women's rights campaigners numbering into the hundreds protested against the Biden administration's executive order allowing boys who identify as female to compete in girls' athletic competitions, among other moves to enshrine transgender policies into law.

On Monday, some 200 women hailing from all across the United States descended on the nation's capital to participate in Women Picket-DC, a nonpartisan event to protest an [executive order](#) signed by President Joe Biden on Jan. 20 that enshrined "gender identity" into federal law.

The event intentionally coincided on International Women's Day and was held on the corner of 15th Street and Constitution Avenue adjacent to the National Mall near The Ellipse. Many held placards urging senators to reject the [Equality Act](#), a pending update to the 1964 Civil Rights Act that would enshrine gender identity as a category into the federal legal code.

Dawn Odell, a conservative Catholic mother, traveled from Washington state to lend her voice in support of women's rights, and to oppose social and medicalized gender-transitioning of [children](#) and trans-activist initiatives like [Drag Queen Story Hour](#) at libraries and in [school curricula](#).

"There are so many ways where kids are being taken advantage of, and completely and irreparably altered forever, and their lives ruined by this transgender movement. It's awful," Odell said in an interview with The Christian Post.

"I see an entire generation of people in ruin, not able to have kids, not able to have any meaningful relationship at all," she added. "It's changing everything."

Holding a Save Women's Sports flag, Beth Scaer, a computer programmer from Nashua, New Hampshire, told CP she believes Biden's executive order is destroying women's sports.

"Whenever a man can come in and take a spot on a woman's team or on a podium, you're depriving women of their rights. Men are bigger, stronger, taller. They can destroy women in sports. It's totally unfair," she said.

Charlie Rae of Raleigh, North Carolina, the writing lead for the Women Picket-DC rally, said the central issue is that the public views gender identity as a human rights cause when it in truth assaults human rights.

"It changes our already existing structures of human rights," Rae said. "And I think that a lot of people mean really well, and they want to protect people and implement human rights. That's why we're here too. But gender identity as a concept — transgenderism, the medicalization, the altering of our social policies and institutions — it doesn't protect people."

"We're here because we want to protect people," however they identify, she stressed.

The protesters' efforts are nonpartisan because they're rooted in "basic common sense," Rae stressed. "And that doesn't have a political party — to know that women are female."

Lead organizer Courtney Piper, who was one of the four speakers at the event, told CP that the narrative of self-declared gender identity has been systematically rolled out in the last 15-20 years and asserted that its propaganda is fueled by massive amounts of money and has spread throughout school systems and government entities.

"The general public truly is under a mass hypnosis and deceit," regarding this issue and others, she said.

"It's the inverse of material reality and spiritual reality. Women are here today to expose the truth and speak truth to power," Piper declared.

When asked what she and her fellow compatriots plan to do should the Senate vote to pass the Equality Act, which Biden has promised to sign into law, Piper said their efforts would never stop.

"If indeed it does [pass], we won't stop fighting. We are going to continue to roll out action after action until our voices are heard and our demands are met," she said.

In remarks before the crowd with the Washington Monument in the background, Suzanne Vierling, a psychologist from Southern California, noted that the sex-based rights of women should be in cement and not even debated, given the hard-fought gains. She drew analogies between present scourges against women to previous ones, particularly black women who were once enslaved.

"Today we have come full-circle, back to women as chattel, if we don't fight. It doesn't seem possible. But today, while the woman is erased as a woman in the name of the law, woman is now stretched out on a platter, stretched out for use, for profit," she said.

"Yesterday's slave woman who endured gynecological medical experiments is today's girl-child being butchered in a booming gender-transitioning sector. Ovaries removed, pushing her into menopause and osteoporosis, uncharted territory, and parents' rights and authority decimated," Vierling added.

Facing the White House and flanked by a participant holding a banner with a quote from the suffragist movement in the early 20th century that read: "Mr. president, how long must women wait for liberty?" Kara Dansky, a radical feminist attorney who serves on the steering committee of the U.S. chapter of the Women's Human Rights Campaign,

addressed the Biden administration, demanding that the Jan. 20 executive order be reversed.

"Mr. president, whether or not you understand it, you have issued an executive order that is set to erase women and girls as a protected category under federal administrative law. Men are not women, even if they say they are; even if they say they identify as women. Women, also, are not men, even if they say they are," Dansky declared.

She went on to express gratitude for a December 2019 tweet by *Harry Potter* series author [J.K. Rowling](#), who voiced support for [Maya Forstater](#), a British woman who was ousted from her job for stating opinions online about the reality of biological sex in the context of the U.K.'s Gender Recognition Act.

That short post on social media from the beloved author was a game-changer, Dansky continued. Rowling has since spoken out at considerable length about her concerns about how radical transgender ideology is diminishing women's rights.

Dansky then quoted from Biden's inaugural speech, in which the president spoke of the importance of rejecting a culture in which facts are manipulated and manufactured.

"Mr. president, I agree. Please stop manipulating and manufacturing facts," Dansky asserted, speaking of gender identity ideology.

She continued: "Mr. president, are you willing to protect the rights, privacy, and safety of women and girls or do you stand with men who pretend to be women? The time to decide is now. Mr. president, we ask you: How long must women wait for liberty."

"So-called gender identity is a corporate takeover of humanity, and you, Mr. president, are complicit. Get it out of our laws. Get it out of our schools. And stop mutilating children's healthy bodies."

"Mr. president, the jig is up. The emperor has no clothes. Women are tired of waiting for liberty. Mr. president, rescind the order."

POLAND: Polish women mark Women's Day protesting abortion ban

By Vanessa Gera

AP News (08.03.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3lclQ2v> - Women's rights activists in Poland marked International Women's Day on Monday caught between reasons to celebrate and a heavy sense that they are facing a long battle ahead.

This year's Women's Day, which was marked with protests, comes after a near total ban on abortion took effect in January in the mostly Roman Catholic country, a step that had long been sought by the conservative ruling party, Law and Justice.

But as Polish Women's Strike leader [Marta Lempart](#) told The Associated Press ahead of a protest in Warsaw, Poland is also a country that is undergoing rapid secularization, with support growing for a liberalized abortion law.

She and other movement leaders are convinced that the process of social change ultimately will favor their struggle for reproductive freedom. Monday's protest focuses on abortion rights, but also included calls for greater state support for in vitro procedures and sexual education.

"We have reasons to celebrate because we are a mass movement, we are the only country that is becoming secular so quickly and that is becoming feminist so quickly," Lempart said.

Around her, supporters of the Women's Strike poured into its Warsaw office, preparing banners and other materials for their "Women's Day Without Compromises" protest hours later.

Compared to mass protests of the past months, Monday's protests were relatively small. The demonstrators, however, faced a large presence of police who created cordons to contain the crowd in a limited area. Police declared the gathering illegal because it defied pandemic restrictions, and officers requested identification from people and some scuffles ensued.

"We keep fighting. I don't see a way to stop it," said Klementyna Suchanow, another Women's Strike leader and the author of a book "This is War: Women, Fundamentalists, and the new Middle Ages," about global efforts by ultra-conservatives to roll back women's rights.

"We are under attack by religious radicals, and this is an international movement. so we women in different countries, we need to face it and fight against it," she said. "It's something that is happening to all of us: to Argentinians, to Americans, to Poles, to Croatians."

Activists noted that Polish women are getting abortions no matter what the law says, some with pills and others by traveling to Slovakia, Germany, Norway or other countries. "If a woman wants to have an abortion nothing will stop her," said activist Marta Krzynowek, who says the restriction on abortion rights are part of a larger assault on democracy in Poland.

"Abortion is only one part of this picture," she added. "We are all very, very tired, but we have the energy to try and change things. This situation isn't good and it is worth fighting for."

Suchanow noted that many activists have been arrested, charged with crimes, or faced police violence at protests.

"This cannot be wasted, it cannot be for nothing," she said.

IRAQ passes law addressing women survivors of Yazidi genocide

The landmark bill formally recognizes the Yazidi genocide and the trauma of sexual violence, but the community still faces grave security concerns and missing men, women and children.

By Joe Snell

AL-Monitor (02.03.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3kW8xTF> - After nearly two years in Iraq's parliament, the Yazidi Women Survivors Law passed on Monday in a landmark for formal recognition of the Yazidi genocide.

The bill calls for compensation, rehabilitation and education for survivors. It also creates a new directorate for survivor's affairs and a civil court in the Nineveh governorate and outlines punishment for people involved in abduction and sexual crimes. The move was applauded by Yazidis as progress in addressing the destruction caused by the Islamic State nearly seven years ago.

"Today's passage of Iraq's Yazidi Survivors Bill is an important first step in acknowledging the gender-based trauma of sexual violence and need for tangible redress," tweeted [Nadia Murad](#), a Yazidi survivor of human trafficking and 2018 Nobel laureate.

First submitted by Iraqi President Barham Salih to the parliament in April 2019, the draft bill was reviewed twice but each time met pushback. Some argued that the text was too narrow in scope and needed to include men and boys that were also kidnapped. Other groups fought for the inclusion of Christians, Shabaks and Turkmens who were also subjected to sexual violence.

A special parliamentary committee was formed to amend the terminology. Last month, however, the legislature failed to achieve the quorum needed for a vote. Days later, Salih called on the parliament to expand and expedite the bill.

Never miss another story

Salih tweeted on Monday that the [vote was a victory](#) for "our daughters who have been subjected to the most heinous violations and crimes of ISIS genocide."

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq also hailed the move as a "[major step](#) in addressing the needs of survivors of atrocities that include reparations and proof of Iraq's commitment to address the crimes they endured."

Some Yazidi community members have cautioned against overstating the bill's importance. The law's passage of the law is an acknowledgement that what happened to Yazidi women and girls was real and deserves recognition and compensation, but pressing needs continue to face the community.

"We want to make sure that this bill does not constitute the end or the solution of state responsibilities to the people," said Pari Ibrahim, executive director of the Free Yazidi Foundation. "We are pleased by this bill's passing, but it does not solve everything."

Last month, the remains of 104 Yazidi victims of IS were transported to Baghdad and given a [state funeral ceremony](#) before returning to the Sinjar village of Kocho for burial. They were killed in an IS attack on Sinjar in August 2014 that targeted the Yazidi community and other minority groups living in the Sinjar region of northern Iraq.

In total, at least 10,000 Yazidis were killed or abducted by the Islamic state. A majority of the once 550,000-strong community was displaced and only about 30% of the Sinjar district's population, which also includes Assyrians, Turkmens and other groups, have since returned. More than 2,700 Yazidis are still missing.

"[Efforts must continue](#) to find out the fate of the [remaining missing and kidnapped](#) persons, provide redress for the victims and hold the criminals accountable," Salih tweeted.

Implementing the law also presents a new challenge amid mounting security and political instability. Public services in Sinjar remain scarce. Infrastructure in the district is still largely destroyed and security is nearly nonexistent, a Yazidi in Sinjar told Al-Monitor.

About [200,000 Yazidis](#) are forced to continue living in displacement camps, but time is running out as Baghdad has called for their closure and for the residents to return home, despite many not having a home to return to.

Armed extremists still haunt the expansive mountain range of Sinjar, where just last week Turkey and Iran called each other's ambassadors to discuss Turkish attacks on Kurdistan Workers Party fighters that have settled in the area after helping drive out IS.

"Without implementing it correctly, the survivors will not get any benefits from it," Saad Babir, spokesperson for Yazda, an international organization that supports Yazidis, told Al-Monitor. "The bill will not end the [suffering that Yazidis are still facing](#) and dealing with on a daily basis."

UNITED KINGDOM/ WORLD: All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief: Report on Gender and FORB

Section Gender and FORB of the Commentary on the Current State of International Freedom of Religion or Belief (2020)
<https://appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/media/2020-APPG-commentary-final.pdf>

APPG (01.03.2021) - Stakeholders of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief have reported concerns at the intersection between freedom of religion or belief and gender in several countries.

This section offers a precis of some of the key issues of concern and several salient examples.

The COVID-19 global pandemic has had catastrophic consequences for vulnerable populations around the globe. At the intersection of gender and FoRB is a compounding of vulnerabilities which in 'normal' times is systematically exploited by antagonists of FoRB.²⁹ This produces a global pattern of abuse including 'forced marriage' and 'sexual assault' as the two most common tactics used against Christian women in 50 countries.³⁰

COVID-19 restrictions have further exacerbated these complex vulnerabilities whilst simultaneously increasing impunity for aggressors. Governments, civil society actors and fragile national infrastructures struggle to deliver a COVID-19 response resulting in greater impunity for perpetrators of gender-specific religious persecution.

Gender-based violence targeting minorities merely blends in with the increased domestic violence or honour killings. Many of these abuses and violations are hidden and under-reported or, at worst, known and yet dismissed in pandemic times. A senior leader in **India** has stated they have lost significant ground in protecting religious minority women against gender-based violence (GBV) as there has been a significant increase in targeted trafficking of vulnerable communities facing economic hardship and lack of food security due to lockdowns.

A report published last year by The Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID) stated, "The evidence gathered suggests that across contexts and religions, there is a pattern of girls and women being targeted for sexual grooming, not

only out of sexual predation, but a wider political project to hurt the religious minority and create a religiously homogenous society.”³¹

Country content:

In **India**, Dalit women experience double marginalisation due to their gender and caste. In October 2020, the BBC reported on a Dalit woman who was gang-raped in Uttar Pradesh.³² The situation in India is a microcosm representative of other regions. FoRB violations here have been exacerbated during COVID-19. Furthermore, evidence suggests that government restrictions and violence are gender specific.

In **Nepal**, some women and girls convert to Christianity. However, it is dangerous for them to reveal their faith, so they quietly or secretly take part in church services. When known, they are discriminated against by their peers, socially ostracized and severely beaten by family members. Immediate family of ‘convert’ Christians may lock them up. After isolation, they are often deprived of basic survival needs, educational support, parental possessions and basic legal rights. Physical violence comes gradually after emotional and mental torture.³³

In some rural areas, Christians are socially boycotted and are not allowed to use community resources. In one instance, the Buddhists living in a post-earthquake IDP camp did not allow Christians to share water from the same supply system, and two separate supplies had to be installed. As it is women who use community resources more often than men, this denial of resources affects them more.³⁴

In **Malaysia**, legal rights of women and girls are undermined by provisions that make exceptions for *sharia*.

Civil society organizations stated in a Feb 2018 CEDAW report "Muslim women now enjoy far less rights in marriage, divorce, guardianship of their children and inheritance than their non-Muslim counterparts." It also stated: "Other areas of gross discrimination against women under the Islamic Family Laws include divorce, polygamy and child marriage."³⁵

These laws open avenues of vulnerability for female converts from Islam to Christianity, the most prevalent being the threat of rape and/or forced marriage to a Muslim. The minimum legal age for marriage in the Islamic family laws (16 for female) can be lowered with the consent of a *sharia* judge. This law increases the vulnerability of girls who convert to Christianity. The federal government tried to act against child marriages but encountered the bitter resistance of conservative Muslim federal states. In some cases, young Christian women are abducted, never to be heard of again. This is an effective tactic because once they are ‘registered’ as Muslims there is no mechanism for reversing this, even in the event of divorce. Additionally, all children born because of the so-called “marriage” are also legally considered Muslim. A small number of converts are thought to have fled or gone into hiding to avoid this kind of religiously motivated family retribution.

In **Iraq**, some 2,800 Yazidi women are still missing and both Yazidis and Christians are subject to regular violence and often blamed for the spread of COVID-19.

Concerns were raised by minority faith groups in August 2019 that proposals to include four Islamic clerics among the Federal Supreme Court's 13 members could mean that *sharia* would always take precedence.

Opponents claimed it would end attempts to overturn legislation such as that which prevents Christian men from marrying Muslim women without converting to Islam.

Iraqi women are guaranteed equal rights in the Iraqi Provisional Constitution, ensuring their right to vote, run for political office, own property, and for girls to attend schools.³⁶

However, there are still existing provisions that discriminate against women in the Iraqi Constitution, the Personal Status Law, and the Penal Code. There has not been significant progress in this since the launch of the Iraqi National Action Plan (INAP) for Women, Peace and Security (WPS) to implement the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (1325) on Women, Peace and Security in 2014. While this was a promise of enabling women's participation and protection in the processes of conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Iraq³⁷ there has been little progress in a country experiencing continued economic instability, popular protests, and security problems. While the constitution requires 25 per cent of MPs to be women, they remain side-lined from making a positive contribution to peace and security initiatives and reconciliation efforts.

The reality for Iraqi women is that the impact of war and sectarian conflict has left many as widows, who can quickly fall victim to poverty.

The impact of freedom of religion and belief violations has further disempowered women from religious minorities. The Daesh conflict, early marriage, exclusion from school, domestic violence, and lack of knowledge of their social and legal rights means that their interests are unrepresented, particularly in the Nineveh Plains area of northern Iraq, which lacks a security framework and federal government commitment to lasting change. Representation continues to be made for a concerted effort to empower Iraqi religious and ethnic minorities, particularly women, through local civic representatives.³⁸ For Iraqi women from religious minorities, it is also virtually impossible for them to secure jobs in the public sector or even in the private sector outside their own communities as they do not have full citizenship rights. The combination of a lack of legal rights, opportunities for employment, violence from within their own communities and the threat of violence from militia groups, and now the COVID-19 pandemic, means that some minorities may leave Iraq permanently,³⁹ pushing Iraq into further economic destabilisation and its religious minorities into extinction.⁴⁰

Women are particularly vulnerable within these destabilising circumstances.

A report by Open Doors USA makes the point that there are gendered differences in how men and women in religious minority communities face pressures at the intersection of gender and religious identity.⁴¹ It observes that men in religious minorities face greater risk of physical violence, economic harassment and incarceration, women face greater risk of sexual violence, forced marriage and forced divorce.⁴²

In **Pakistan**, the Hazara Shia community had to face the consequences of the provincial government's mishandling of the COVID-19 crisis, as the community was blamed⁴³ for the spread of the virus. Hazara women in particular bore the brunt. Most of the Hazara women who were forced to quarantine had to spend 44⁴⁴ days in the quarantine camp in Quetta, Balochistan. The quarantine camps had sub-standard facilities⁴⁵ such as a lack of washrooms and water. Hazara women even had to face difficulties due to the racial

profiling⁴⁶ of the community in the post-quarantine scenario. According to one report, some local doctors in Quetta refused⁴⁷ to treat Hazara women fearing that they will spread the virus. Similarly, women from Hindu Christian faiths in Pakistan continued to face persecution such as forced conversions and forced marriages during 2020 (details in the Pakistan country section).

In **Colombia**, women deciding to become an active Christian can face domestic abuse and sexual abuse. A former guerrilla combatant was sexually abused by her comrades when she left the group after she converted to Christianity. Another young woman grew up as a Christian, but abandoned her faith when she met her future husband. She later returned to her faith, whereupon her husband, a judge, began to abuse her, and threatening to end the marriage and to take the children away. For a time she practiced her faith secretly, but when her husband tried to force her to sign a document saying she would never take her children to church, she refused. She lost custody of the children and was forced to give him compensation.⁴⁸

Footnotes

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AFRICA: UK – FGM policies may be alienating some African diaspora communities

By Nazia Parveen and Aamna Mohdin

WUNRN (18.02.2021) - <https://bit.ly/2ZHWzDu> - Safeguarding policies introduced to protect women and girls against female genital mutilation (FGM) are instead eroding trust and alienating African diaspora communities, a study has found.

Current FGM safeguarding measures are undermining the welfare and safety of the women and young girls they seek to protect, with families feeling racially profiled, criminalised and stigmatised, according to the report.

The report, published by African women's rights organisation Forward and the University of Huddersfield, examines the lived experiences of FGM safeguarding policies and procedures in the UK.

Based on interviews with communities and professionals, including serving police officers, it found that health and social care workers, teachers and the police are concerned about the growing mistrust within their communities, and are sceptical of the need to single out FGM from other forms of child abuse.

Key findings included that safeguarding policies enacted since 2014 may have inadvertently done a great deal of harm to families, communities and young girls, potentially across the UK.

They increased the scrutiny, suspicion and stigmatisation experienced by families in many areas of their lives, from school, to healthcare, to overseas travel, the report said. These experiences had taken a significant toll on the mental health of parents, who said they had no intention of carrying out FGM on their daughters, and in some cases even campaigned against it.

Professionals participating in the study expressed equal concern over the ways in which the current policies had burdened some families, and warned against a growing disconnect between them and the diaspora communities.

"The current FGM safeguarding policies are causing quite a lot of harm. Communities are feeling targeted and that they are racially profiled. There is a general sense of assumption that many of these African diaspora communities are having the intention of subjecting their daughters to FGM, even if in some of the cases that's not actually true," said Amy Abdelshahid, lead author and head of evidence at Forward.

She added there is an excessive focus on families from certain communities when they travel abroad. "Sometimes they may receive home visits from social services and police investigating them and interrogating before they are able to travel," she said.

Asha, from the Somali community, who participated in the study, said: "When children are going on summer holiday, mothers face fear ... The assumption is that you are going on holiday and you are doing FGM to your daughter. It's really the holiday that you were thinking about."

Abdelshahid said participants also spoke of having to endure repetitive and uncomfortable conversations about their own FGM and their intention of having it carried out on their daughters in healthcare settings.

"What we're seeing is that in different touchpoints of their lives, they are getting that constant scrutiny by different types of professionals across many areas," she added.

In an interview with a police detective, she said singling out FGM as a particular issue could be stigmatising for a community, "whereas we should be looking at all forms of abuse within every community".

Abdelshahid said: "We think the policies could end up being counterproductive."

She pointed to a quote in the report by a social worker who warned communities are staying away from them. "And that is really alarming, because if community organisations are not able to do the awareness raising and grassroots work that has proven to be very effective in the past, then we're risking undermining quite a lot of fundamental and essential work."

The report makes a series of recommendations to address FGM in a more compassionate and inclusive way, including the introduction of more holistic training for professionals, re-examining the current policies and a focus on policies that recognise the role of communities in eliminating FGM.

However, the feminist campaigner Nimco Ali – who has been a key figure in the global fight to end FGM – praised the work being carried out by the government, stating that the practice would only be eradicated via legislation and state-level involvement.

Ali, who is a survivor of FGM and was appointed by the Home Secretary, Priti Patel, as an independent adviser to help draw up a strategy to tackle violence against women and girls, said: "When I was growing up it was all about trying to work with communities – which is good – but FGM is an organised crime. The idea that we need to return to talking and negotiating with communities is a non-starter.

"I absolutely understand [the need] for the state to take control of this issue, and it is the reason FGM was added to the Children's Act. We are going to ask uncomfortable questions. Why are we offended that these questions are being asked? We need these safety nets."

Victoria Atkins, the Safeguarding Minister, said: "Female genital mutilation is a crime. It causes extreme and lifelong physical and psychological suffering to women and girls and we will not tolerate this child abuse taking place in our country.

"The government introduced tough safeguarding laws which compel certain professionals to report if they have encountered a potential child victim of female genital mutilation, regardless of what community they are from."

PAKISTAN: Virginty tests for female rape survivors outlawed by Pakistani court

By Haroon Janjua

WUNRN (04.02.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3jwOSZQ> - On 6 January 2021, a Pakistani court has outlawed the practice of subjecting female rape survivors to a virginty test in an unprecedented ruling.

Lahore's high court ruled on Monday that the virginty test has no legal basis and "offends the personal dignitv of the female victim".

Making the judgment, Justice Ayesha Malik said: "Virginity testing is highly invasive, having no scientific or medical requirement, yet carried out in the name of medical protocols in sexual violence cases.

"It is a humiliating practice, which is used to cast suspicion on the victim, as opposed to focusing on the accused and the incident of sexual violence."

In a 2018 [report](#), the UN said that virginity tests, a medically dubious internal examination of a woman's hymen, still take place in 20 countries, and can be conducted with or without consent in rape cases or when a woman is accused of a "moral" crime such as premarital sex or running away.

Premarital sex remains a crime in Pakistan for men and women and carries a five-year prison sentence.

"The verdict is the culmination of a history of activism and built on the hard work that the feminist movement has been engaging in for decades. The test is part of a larger structure of patriarchy that hinges victimhood on women's characters and perpetuates the myth of the 'perfect victim'," Nighat Dad, a lawyer and rights activist told the Guardian.

"The barriers in place for women to report cases of rape are insurmountable, but this historic verdict will go a long way in dismantling those barriers," she said.

In October Human Rights Watch [said](#) virginity examinations had long been a routine part of criminal proceedings in Pakistan, based on a misogynistic assumption that a woman "habituated to sexual intercourse" is less likely to have been raped. Police and prosecutors have used the results to accuse rape victims of illegal sexual intercourse and to treat them as criminals.

Pakistan's minister for human rights, Shireen Mazari, lauded the judgment, which will apply only in the state of Punjab, on [Twitter](#).

INDONESIA bans mandatory Islamic 'hijab' scarves for schoolgirls

AFP/ Dawn (06.02.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3rAuWrY> - Indonesia has banned schools from forcing girls to wear Islamic "hijab" headscarves after the case of a Christian pupil pressured to cover up sparked outrage in the world's most populous Muslim nation.

The move was applauded Friday by rights activists, who say non-Muslim girls have been forced for years to wear a hijab in conservative parts of the country.

State schools across the Southeast Asian archipelago of nearly 270 million will face sanctions if they fail to comply with the edict from education minister Nadiem Makarim.

On Wednesday he said religious attire was an individual choice, and said schools "cannot make it compulsory".

Schools that violate the rules could see their government funding cut, he added.

"The decree is a positive step to protect women's rights in Indonesia," said Andreas Harsono, senior researcher at Human Rights Watch in Jakarta.

He said public schools had forced millions of girls and women teachers to wear a hijab, prompting "bullying, intimidation, social pressures -- and in some cases, expulsion and forced resignation" if they didn't.

There have been concerns about growing religious intolerance in a nation where nearly 90 percent of the population follows Islam.

The headscarf issue grabbed headlines after a Christian student in West Sumatra's Padang City was pressured to wear a hijab.

She refused, and her parents later secretly recorded a meeting with an official who insisted that school rules required all girls to wear a hijab, regardless of their religion.

The school later issued an apology after the video went viral.

Religious affairs minister Yaquut Cholil Qoumas described the Sumatra case as the "tip of the iceberg".

"Religion is not supposed to be a reason for conflict or a justification to act unfairly towards those with different beliefs," he said.

The new regulations will not apply to conservative Aceh province, which follows religious law under a longstanding autonomy deal.

POLAND: Abortion law: Protesters take to streets again as near-total ban comes into force

By Euronews with AFP, AP (28.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/39tFrqU> - New anti-government protests broke out in Polish cities on Wednesday, shortly after the country's top court confirmed its highly divisive ruling that will further tighten the predominantly Catholic nation's strict anti-abortion law.

The ban on abortions in nearly all circumstances is to come into effect after the law was published in the Official Gazette on Wednesday.

Thousands of people gathered outside the court building in Warsaw in the evening, responding to calls for new protests by women's groups who masterminded weeks of massive demonstrations last year against the initial ruling in October.

Protesters later marched through the city centre to the ruling party's headquarters with signs of the leading "Women's Strike" group and pro-LGBT rights rainbow flags.

Protests were also held in many other cities, under a heavy police presence. More demonstrations are planned for Thursday.

Delayed law takes effect

The law, originally passed in October, was subsequently delayed due to widespread protests throughout the country against the measure, which took place amid the coronavirus pandemic and saw clashes between demonstrators and police. No violence was reported at Wednesday's protests.

Poland's ruling conservative government said on Twitter: "The Constitutional Court presented a written justification of the ruling on the protection of life. In accordance with constitutional requirements, the ruling will be published today in the Official Gazette."

The Constitutional Court, which was reformed by the religious, conservative Law and Justice Party (PiS), [has banned abortions](#) of fetuses with congenital defects. Termination of pregnancy will now be allowed only if the woman's health is threatened or if the pregnancy is the result of a criminal act, such as rape or incest.

Critics argue that it narrows the already tight law to a near total ban of abortions.

Poland already had some of the strictest abortion laws in the European Union. Even before the ruling, many Polish women sought abortions in neighbouring Germany or the Czech Republic.

An estimated 200,000 abortions are performed illegally or abroad every year, according to feminist organisations.

The main opposition Civic Platform party condemned the court's move Wednesday as "a provocation" by the ruling party Law and Justice (PiS). It is widely seen as having undue influence on the judiciary following reforms it passed affecting the way judges are appointed.

Leader Borys Budka attacked the decision on Twitter, accusing Jarosław Kaczyński, leader of PiS and deputy prime minister, of using the ban to "cover up the traces of the government's defeat in the fight against COVID" and "the failure of the vaccination programme".

Another opposition leader, Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, tweeted urging the government to "save the economy, don't set Poland ablaze."

New law fails to deter activists

The government announcement led to immediate calls for activists to take to the streets in Warsaw and across the country.

"We urge everyone to take to the streets...Express your anger as you see fit," Marta Lempart of the Women's Strike, the main movement behind the protests, told reporters on Wednesday.

"The whole of Poland is mobilising, not just Warsaw, we are ready! When we talk about women's hell, we can now talk about government hell," added Klementyna Suchanow, also from the movement.

The new law was made in response to a motion from over 100 ruling party lawmakers, whose names have not been made public.

The unrest shows growing discontent among many Poles with the right-wing government, which has been criticised by European officials and politicians for eroding democracy.

IRAN: Gov't approves bill against domestic violence

Masoumeh Ebtekar, vice president for women and family affairs, dedicated the move to 'worthy and patient Iranian women' in a tweet.



The bill was finalised by the government after several high-profile incidents concerning women [File: Majid Asgaripour/WANA via Reuters]



By Maziar Motamedi

Al Jazeera (04.01.2021) – <https://bit.ly/35dPcqk> – The government of Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani has approved a longstanding bill that aims to better protect women against domestic and other forms of violence.

In a meeting on Sunday evening, cabinet ministers greenlit the draft bill, called Protection, Dignity and Security of Women Against Violence, which has been in the works since the administration of former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The bill must now be reviewed and approved by the parliament, after which it will be sent to the powerful constitutional vetting body called the Guardian Council, consisting of jurists and religious experts.

The most senior woman in Rouhani’s outgoing government hailed the move, which she said was the result of hundreds of hours of work by tens of legal experts, judges, executives and officials.

Masoumeh Ebtekar, vice president for women and family affairs, dedicated the 58-article bill to “worthy and patient Iranian women” in a tweet.

The legislation completed its lengthy process of review by the judiciary in September 2019.

It defines violence as “any behavior inflicted on women due to sexuality, vulnerable position or type of relationship, and inflicts harm to their body, psyche, personality and dignity, or restricts or deprives them of legal rights and freedoms”.

It obligates the judiciary to create offices to support victims of violence and hold educational courses for judges and other judiciary staff.

The bill also envisages the formation of a fund by the judiciary to support victims of violence and help imprisoned women, among other things.

The state broadcaster is also directed by the legislation to produce more programmes that promote the support of women and the prevention of violence against them as family values.

Moreover, the bill sees a role for the ministry of education in holding educational courses for students, teachers and parents, and in better identifying vulnerable students.

The ministry of health, on the other hand, is tasked by the draft bill to boost its medical and psychological services to women and train experts in handling women who have fallen victim to violence.

Law enforcement and prison organisations are among other entities that will have to increase their efforts as part of the vision laid out in the legislation.

In a report published last month, rights group Human Rights Watch said the bill had several positive provisions, including those that engaged different parts of the government and other entities in women's issues.

But the New York-based organisation said the bill "falls short of international standards" as it does not criminalise some forms of gender-based violence, including marital rape and child marriage.

The bill was finalised by the government after several high-profile incidents concerning women that took centre stage nationally during the past year.

In late May 2020, a 14-year-old girl called Romina Ashrafi was gruesomely beheaded by her father in an apparent case of "honour-killing". The father was given a nine-year jail sentence.

In September, decades-old sexual traumas were unearthed as Iranian women launched their own version of the global #MeToo movement on social media.

The movement implicated several high-profile artists and one major company, and led to at least one arrest.

WORLD: A report on conflict-related sexual slavery

*A report by the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (2020)
See <https://bit.ly/2M9pVHr>*

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- A. Marginalization and Stigma Experienced by Victims/Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Slavery
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- X. Survivors and Women's Rights Organizations' Advocacy for Accountability and Efforts to Address the Impacts of Contemporary Conflict-Related Sexual Slavery
- Δ. Challenges in Holding Key Actors Accountable for the Full and Effective Implementation of the WPS Resolutions and International Laws on Conflict-Related Sexual Slavery

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

Executive summary

Conflict-related sexual slavery is a widespread, systematic, institutionalized, and deliberate human rights abuse committed by militaries under government supervision, state-sponsored militia groups, non-state armed groups, violent extremist groups, and criminal networks alike. Causing tremendous and long-lasting harm to women, girls, and entire communities, sexual slavery is used as a weapon of war, a wartime strategy, or a tactic of terrorism to recruit and retain fighters, fund operations, instill fear, destroy communities, and promote ideology.

The context in which conflict-related sexual slavery is occurring has evolved since World War Two. The rise of violent extremist groups and criminal networks has contributed to the widespread use of the bodies of women and girls as a form of currency in the political economy of war. Forced displacement, refugee crises, and humanitarian emergencies as a

result of armed conflict have further exacerbated insecurity for women and girls, increasing their vulnerability to sexual slavery.

Survivors of sexual slavery are not a homogenous group—each individual experience is unique and affected by geography, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, nationality, and religion, among other intersecting factors. Yet survivors across conflict contexts often face high levels of stigmatization and marginalization from their communities and families. In spite of this, many survivors have broken the barrier of silence and actively advocate for accountability and reparations from perpetrators, dispelling the narrative that survivors of conflict-related sexual slavery are passive victims without agency. In the absence of effective action taken by global and national policymakers to address conflict-related sexual slavery, survivors—with the support of women's civil society—call for accountability, justice, relief and recovery services, protection, and prevention of reoccurrence.

Although international human rights, humanitarian, and criminal laws and policies on preventing violent extremism and countering terrorism recognize and condemn conflict-related sexual slavery, significant gaps persist when it comes to consistent, coherent, and specific efforts at prevention, protection, accountability, and relief and recovery for survivors. The failure to address conflict-related sexual slavery through Bender-responsive peace processes, post-conflict resolution, and transitional justice mechanisms contributes to a reoccurrence of the crime, along with continued impunity for perpetrators and inadequate redress for survivors.

The Women, Peace, and Security resolutions adopted by the United Nations Security Council provide a critical framework to improve the global response to conflict-related sexual slavery.

However, it is essential to strengthen specific policies, provisions, and programming on conflict-related sexual slavery for the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security resolutions, including National Action Plans. Localization of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 is an important instrument to ensure that the needs of survivors of sexual slavery are met and to prevent the reoccurrence of the crime, through context-specific, survivor-centered conflict resolution initiatives developed in partnership with women's civil society.

The coinciding 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, and the 20th anniversary of the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal for the Trial of Japan's Military Sexual Slavery in 2020 present a critical opportunity to highlight the need to step up the response to sexual slavery, particularly justice and reparation for survivors as well as prevention efforts. It is a unique moment for survivors, women's rights organizations, and civil society groups worldwide to demand that the United Nations, Member States, regional organizations, the International Criminal Court, and the International Court of Justice take concerted action to end sexual slavery in collaboration with civil society, the media, academia, faith-based institutions and other key stakeholders.

The Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), with support from the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), coordinated a global research to analyze historical and contemporary incidences of sexual slavery, from World War Two to the present geopolitical context. The overall goal of the research is to promote synergies in the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda, international humanitarian and human rights laws, and policies to prevent and counter violent extremism to improve the prevention of, protection from, accountability mechanisms for, and relief and recovery for survivors of sexual slavery. To ensure that this research reflects the voices of survivors of sexual slavery and women's civil society on the ground in conflict-affected communities, the research team produced three case studies: one on

sexual slavery during World War Two in Asia and the Pacific, and two on more recent incidences of sexual slavery in Uganda and Iraq respectively. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions with survivors of conflict-related sexual slavery, women's rights activists, local and national government officials, human rights lawyers, and grassroots peacebuilders in Korea, Uganda, and Iraq, along with global policymakers were conducted.

This advocacy brief summarizes the key findings and recommendations of the global research and case studies. The full-length global research and case studies will also be made available. GNWP hopes that this research will inform and strengthen the global response to conflict-related sexual slavery and survivor-centered implementation of the WPS Agenda. Critically, this research will serve as a key advocacy tool for victims and survivors of sexual slavery and their families, and civil society activists.
