EQUALITY IS MY RIGHT NOT A PRIVILEGE
Throughout the year, we continued to expand our work in each of our four key priority areas: 


- While courts in many parts of the world closed during the pandemic, we conducted detailed research on national and international sexual violence laws and published reports that will form the basis of our advocacy to reform laws around the globe.

- We secured justice for more women and girls through targeted litigation and advocacy campaigns, including a landmark success in Sudan, where we helped secure freedom from prison for Noura Hussein, who was sentenced to death for defending herself against her rapist after being forced into marriage at just 17.

- We grew and expanded our work around the world, amplifying our presence in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), working closely with partners in Georgia to revolutionize criminal justice for survivors of rape, and shining a light on how legal and cultural inequality harms women and girls in South Asia and the Americas.

- We continued our work to shape the law by first shaping both hearts and minds, including through bold campaigns against female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage, and by working with journalists to influence and improve media reporting of these issues.

- We strengthened our campaign for equality in the family, engaging with stakeholders across Africa and MENA to spearhead reforms.

- We also doubled down on our commitment to make the digital world a safer place for women, working alongside the Thomson Reuters Foundation on a ground-breaking legal analysis of online sexual exploitation and abuse, and launching a bold new partnership with Women Leading in AI to explore how to end misogyny in the digital world. A special feature about our work against online sexual exploitation and abuse (OSEA) is included in this report.

We are proud of everything that we achieved together during 2021, and enormously grateful for the continued support of people like you. Because only together can we continue our work to make the world a safer, fairer, and more prosperous world — for everyone.

YASMEEN HASSAN
Global Executive Director, Equality Now
Provided expert support for 12 cases, challenging sex discrimination in law, protecting anti-FGM laws, ensuring effective implementation, and achieving precedent-setting judgments.

Led 46 campaigns across our four thematic areas.

Positively impacted 1,861 women and girls directly through our work, as well as at least 1,537,000 women and girls set to benefit from legal changes, our defense of existing protections, and better implementation of laws.

Submitted 41 expert submissions to the UN and regional bodies advocating for law and policy reform across all of our focus areas.

Published 11 significant reports, manuals, and toolkits across our thematic areas.

Worked in tandem with 133 partners across 36 countries.
Our work on achieving legal equality involves a unique combination of legal advocacy, regional partnership-building, and community mobilization to encourage governments to adopt, improve, and enforce laws that protect and promote the rights of women and girls.

During 2021, we continued to develop our role as a leader by informing, convening, and facilitating the strategies, stakeholders, and approaches that we know from experience are necessary to achieve and sustain gender equality around the world.
KEY ACHIEVEMENTS DURING 2021

Holding governments to account

We continued to see further reform of laws highlighted in our global advocacy report, Words & Deeds - Holding Governments Accountable in the Beijing +25 Review Process. For example, in January 2021, the president of the Dominican Republic enacted and published a law and issued a decree banning marriage below the age of 18, while in the US, a directive banning transgender people from serving in the military was effectively reversed.

In the US, we continued to support the ERA Coalition’s long-running campaign to secure constitutional equality for all women. We maintained pressure on the government to publish and certify the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), including by preparing an updated amicus brief for the appeal in a strategic litigation case and submitting written testimony to a House of Representatives Committee hearing.

A leading voice on gender equality and the law

Our ongoing thought leadership on gender equality and the law led to invitations to contribute to a number of high-profile campaigns and projects during 2021, keeping the issue high on the international agenda.

In May, we were invited by the Danish Institute for Human Rights to speak on gender justice, equality, and the law; in October, we were invited by UN Women and UNDP to be the Civil Society Representative at the launch of the UN System-Wide Dashboard on Gender Parity; and, as a member of the UN Women’s Equality In Law strategy Advisory Committee, we contributed to the development of a study on child marriage and law reform.

Securing the future of women’s rights in Africa

As Secretariat to the Solidarity for African Women’s Rights (SOAWR) coalition, we led strategic interventions in 14 countries in Africa. Meanwhile, evidence from our ongoing assessment of the implementation of the Maputo Protocol and other treaties informed implementation in four regional economic communities.

We also hosted judicial fellows and our inaugural Africa-focused moot court competition, demonstrating to the next generation of advocates the utility of regional and international human rights instruments in the enforcement, promotion, and protection of the rights of women and girls.

Following the successful launch of our MENA Family Law Network, we worked with national partners to develop and launch sub-regional campaigns on fair distribution of matrimonial wealth in divorce, custody of children by divorced mothers, and child marriage in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, and Palestine, aiming to change discriminatory laws and practices across the region.

Esther Waweru, Senior Legal Advisor at Equality Now at the High Court in Nairobi at a hearing on the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act, 2011.
We are working toward a world where women and girls are protected from harmful practices by the law and are surrounded by social attitudes and behaviors that enforce women’s equality. Through a combination of advocacy reporting, strategic litigation, and partnership-building, Equality Now pressures governments to end harmful practices and address the gender inequalities that drive them, creating a safer, healthier world for girls.

During 2021, our work in this area focused on amplifying the voices of survivors while collaborating with journalists and the media to change minds as well as policies.
**KEY ACHIEVEMENTS DURING 2021**

**Shaping anti-FGM laws and media reporting in Africa**

In March, following an ongoing campaign coordinated by Equality Now to ensure legal protection for women and girls at risk of FGM in Kenya, the High Court in Nairobi upheld and validated the constitutionality of the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act, 2011.

Building on this important decision, and in recognition of the critical role of the Kenyan media in shaping public discourse and influencing policymakers, we also worked in collaboration with the Anti-FGM Board and the Association of Media Women in Kenya during 2021, to produce a toolkit to support media professionals to report on FGM accurately and responsibly to the public.

Alongside this, we hosted a series of FGM reporting workshops for West African journalists. We engaged journalists from 11 countries through study tours to highlight the harmful effects of FGM as part of our work to influence community leaders and decision makers to adopt and fully implement laws prohibiting the practice.

**Campaigning against FGM in non-traditional countries**

Throughout 2021, we made a number of submissions to treaty bodies to highlight the issue of FGM in countries where it is not traditionally known to occur, including Canada, where we worked with the End FGM Canada Network on a joint submission to the UN Committee Against Torture (CAT), as well as in the Maldives and in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

In response, the UN recommended that the UAE should submit reports on legislative and other measures taken to eradicate FGM. They recommended that the Maldivian government should criminalize FGM, take proactive measures to protect women and girls from FGM, and prosecute clerics promoting FGM, which the government committed to do.

**Tackling child marriage in MENA and the United States**

We continued our work with partners in the Middle East and North Africa to address the issue of under-age marriage in the region. In Lebanon, we successfully finalized a draft bill that sets 18 years as a minimum age of marriage for all religious denominations. In Egypt, we successfully supported the introduction of a draft bill that more heavily penalizes child marriage, while also co-launching a campaign to facilitate advocacy on the issue by women’s rights organizations.

In New York, as an active member of Unchained at Last’s NY Coalition to End Child Marriage, we successfully supported a draft bill eliminating the exception for 17-year-olds to be married with judicial consent, which was signed into law in July, making it just the 6th US state to set the age of marriage at 18, with no exceptions.

**Securing justice for a rape survivor in Sudan**

In 2021, our long-running campaign to secure justice for Noura Hussein, a young Sudanese woman who was sentenced to death for defending herself against her rapist, was finally completed when she was released from prison.

At 17, Noura was forcibly married off against her will to a man who raped her with the aid of three male relatives. When he attempted to rape her again, Noura defended herself. The man died in the ensuing struggle, and Noura was sentenced to death by a Sudanese court. In 2018, following international attention and direct legal support from Equality Now and our partners in Sudan, her death sentence was quashed and commuted to five years in prison.

Our ongoing campaign enabled Noura to access counseling and support to complete her secondary school education while in prison. We continued to press the judiciary for her early release and coordinated the payment of “diya” (financial compensation) to the family of the deceased man, which is required under Sudanese law as a condition of release.

Noura is now living in Khartoum and happily married. She is studying for a university degree.
During 2021, we continued our work against all forms of sexual exploitation through a combination of strategic litigation and campaigns to highlight the factors that lead to women and girls being more likely to be sexually exploited, including the rapid emergence of new digital technologies. We worked with partners around the world to advocate for global and collaborative solutions that are grounded in international human rights law and standards.
KEY ACHIEVEMENTS DURING 2021

**Amplifying survivor voices in Malawi**

In August, we co-hosted a panel discussion with our local partner on sex trafficking in Malawi, bringing together survivors with key policymakers to explore ways of securing justice for victims and holding perpetrators to account in line with Malawi’s national law and international obligations.

As a result, the representative Ministries and institutions on the panel committed to intensifying awareness programs on human trafficking, including by increasing training for prosecutors and magistrates on human trafficking, its various manifestations, the legal framework for addressing the problem, and the promotion of the rights of victims and survivors. A proposal was also made to introduce specialized Trafficking in Persons mobile courts to enhance access to justice and expedite the hearing of trafficking cases.

**Contributing to a landmark prosecution in Kenya**

In November, following extensive campaigning and support by Equality Now, Kenya’s Shanzu Law Court delivered a landmark ruling against a prominent businessman accused of trafficking 12 Nepali women and girls into Kenya, sentencing him to 60 years in prison.

With prosecution for sex trafficking and sexual exploitation offenses being notoriously difficult despite their high prevalence, this case set an important precedent that we believe will serve to deter other perpetrators from trafficking girls and women for sexual exploitation.

**Analyzing the global impact of online sexual exploitation and abuse**

In November, in partnership with Thomson Reuters Foundation, we published Ending Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Women and Girls: A Call for International Standards, our comprehensive report on the legal landscape surrounding online sexual exploitation and abuse (OSEA) at the international and regional level, with a focus on Europe, and at the national level across five countries.

Using a survivor-centric approach, the report illustrates the impact of OSEA and highlights the challenges faced in keeping people safe in a rapidly changing digital landscape. It also includes a series of recommendations for actions that can be taken by the international community, governments, and digital service providers to holistically address OSEA.

**Advocating for legal reform**

During 2021 we continued to add our voice to the development and reform of international and regional legislation and processes relating to OSEA.

We made comments and submissions to GREVIO’s General Recommendation on online VAWG, to the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, and during the UN Appraisal of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons. In the UK, we contributed to discussions on the Online Safety Bill and to consultations on the development of new laws surrounding image-based sexual abuse.

We also brought together key international policy actors by hosting events and discussions, including the CEDAW Chair on the CEDAW Committee General Recommendation on trafficking of women and girls in the context of global migration, the UN General Assembly Appraisal of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, and various CSW events.
Sexual violence is a form of gender-based violence that can only be eliminated by tackling the root causes of sexism. During 2021 we continued our work in this area by advocating for the introduction and effective implementation of robust laws that protect women and girls, while growing our evidence base and diversifying our network of partners to expand and evolve our collective understanding of justice.
KEY ACHIEVEMENTS DURING 2021

Changing attitudes to adolescent survivors

Our work in Africa to address the victimization of adolescent survivors of sexual exploitation and violence led to important changes in attitudes in Sierra Leone and Tanzania in 2021.

In Sierra Leone, our professional training programs for judges, magistrates, prosecutors, and police led to an acknowledgment from leaders in the judiciary of the need to support adolescent girls to access justice swiftly.

In Tanzania, our work to overturn the discriminatory policy that permanently expels pregnant girls and adolescent mothers from school prompted the government to issue a statement of their intent to offer such girls an opportunity to rejoin the mainstream education program.

Challenging sexual violence in South Asia and the Americas

In April 2021, we co-authored a report with Dignity Alliance International, containing an in-depth analysis of laws, policies, and practices related to sexual violence in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, India, and Sri Lanka.

In September, we released a report exposing the gaps and loopholes in the sexual violence laws of 43 jurisdictions in 35 countries in North America, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean.

By highlighting barriers to accessing justice and implementation gaps in the laws within each criminal justice system, we showed how these countries are effectively denying justice to survivors of sexual violence.

In the Maldives, following the publication of our report and alongside our support to partner Uthema’s advocacy work, an amendment was made to the Sexual Offences Act that includes the criminalization of marital rape in all circumstances, and strengthening investigation procedures in rape cases.

Promoting a multi-sectoral approach in Kenya

In June 2021, the Government of Kenya made a valiant decision to end gender-based violence, including sexual violence, within the next five years. To facilitate this, we supported the government in introducing a multi-sectoral approach to improve the coordination of anti-sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) interventions within and between government departments.

This has involved encouraging the government to institutionalize its commitments by linking each one to a state department or organization, developing accountability frameworks, and embedding meaningful engagement with non-governmental, civil society, women’s rights, and grassroots organizations and communities.

We also provided technical support to the County Executives in the development and adoption of a number of new policies, including the Child Protection Policy, SGBV Policy, and Gender Mainstreaming Policy.

Improving investigation and prosecution in Georgia

The publication in 2021 of our Manual on Effective Investigation, Prosecution and Adjudication of Sexual Violence Crimes in Georgia, combined with our ongoing work with the Ministry of Interior and Chief Prosecutor’s Office, has led to radical changes in how the country’s criminal justice system is responding to sexual violence.

The manual, which is the first of its kind in Georgia and the region, offers guidance to investigators, prosecutors and judges when dealing with cases involving sexual violence. As a result of its adoption and use, there are now more than 350 specialized investigators and prosecutors of sexual violence in Georgia. As a consequence, in 2021, as compared to 2020, prosecutions of sexual violence in Georgia increased by 76% (from 143 to 252 cases).
Looking Forward

With 2022 marking 30 years since Equality Now was founded, we took time at the end of 2021 to reflect on our long-term impact and the significant advances that we, along with the women’s rights movement as a whole, have achieved.

Despite what has been an extraordinary degree of progress, we now find ourselves in a world where the rights of women and girls are once again under threat.

Today, investments in equality for women are decreasing at alarming rates as funds are re-prioritized and agendas change with new, conservative leadership. Decreased funding means that not only do women suffer, communities can’t benefit from the broader outcomes of gender equality, for example, more money in economies, less violence, and less instability.

Reflecting on our progress has shown us the path ahead. From 2022, the year of our 30th anniversary, we plan to double down on the commitment to our vision and scale up to meet the growing assault on justice for women and girls around the world.

We know we can create the most impact through globalizing our work, expanding our influence, and connecting our networks as we move into new contexts. We must galvanize people around shared goals to attract and mobilize more resources. And we will organize ourselves to become more effective and united as One Equality Now.

These ideas – Globalize, Galvanize, and Lead – underpin our work for the next three years and form the framework for our 2022-24 organizational strategy: Future Proofing Equality.

We will work harder and do more for women and girls around the world, exploring and using innovative solutions to tackle both emerging and entrenched inequalities.

In the next three years, we will contribute to:
- Making the digital world a safe, secure, and equal place for women and girls
- Ensuring equality in the family for women and girls
- Ensuring access to justice for survivors of sexual violence
- Promoting better implementation of laws to protect women and girls through a multi-sectoral approach
- Facilitating regional movements

We will organize and mobilize the communities around us, bringing new people into our movement with the influence and resources to face every future challenge.

In the next three years, we will:
- Be a home for those who want to invest in and achieve enduring change
- Be an innovative and influential campaigner and a beacon of change for women and girls
- Be a champion and advocate for those that progress new solutions to achieve gender equality

We will act as one coherent and effective organization, delivering and demonstrating impact.

In the next three years, we will:
- Develop improved strategic decision-making and enhance our impact reporting
- Enhance our systems and policies to ensure they are user-focused and that they support a growing, flexible, and dispersed organization
- Upskill staff to succeed
- Evolve our Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion policies and practices
- Prepare the organization for a leadership transition