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LONDON, September 24, 2013 ?A new World Bank and IFC report finds legal and regulatory barriers to womens economic inclusion have decreased over the past 50 years globally, but many laws still hinder womens participation in the economy. Laws restricting womens economic activity are currently most prevalent in the Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. The third in a series, Women, Business and the Law 2014: Removing Restrictions to Enhance Gender Equality monitors regulations affecting women entrepreneurs and employees in 143 economies. This edition highlights reforms carried out over the past two years, examines the evolution of womens property rights and legal decision making ability since 1960 and expands coverage to examine legal protections addressing violence against women. The ideal of equality before the law and equality of economic opportunity isnt just wise social policy: Its smart economic policy, said World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim. "When women and men participate in economic life on an equal footing, they can contribute their energies to building a more cohesive society and a more resilient economy. The surest way to help enrich the lives of families, communities and economies is to allow every individual to live up to her or his fullest creative potential." Our latest edition of Women, Business and the Law shows that many societies have made progress, gradually moving to dismantle ingrained forms of discrimination against women, said Kim. "Yet a great deal remains to be done." This report finds 44 economies have made 48 legal changes, thus increasing womens economic opportunities over the past two years. Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, the Philippines and the Slovak Republic had the most reforms. Among the reforms, husbands can no longer unilaterally stop their wives from working in Côte d'Ivoire and Mali, the Philippines has lifted restrictions on night work for women, and the Slovak Republic increased the percentage of wages paid during maternity leave. The report finds economies in Eastern Europe and Central Asia have the most extensive lists of jobs women cannot do. For example, in the Russian Federation women cannot drive trucks in the agricultural sector, in Belarus they cannot be carpenters and in Kazakhstan they cannot be welders. These restrictions may have arisen from a desire to protect women, but can limit their employment options. The report shows economies with the most job restrictions on women have lower female participation in the formal labor force. "Progress on gender equality under the law is accelerating," said Augusto Lopez-Claros, Director, Global Indicators and Analysis, World Bank Group. "Our data shows that over the past 50 years countries everywhere have started removing long-standing restrictions on women's ability to participate more fully in the economy. Although the progress has been uneven across the world, there is widespread recognition that the economic empowerment of women is crucial for competitiveness and prosperity." Between 1960 and 2010, more than half the restrictions on womens property rights and ability to conduct legal transactions were removed in the 100 economies examined. Restrictions in three regions - Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and East Asia and the Pacific - were cut in half. While some restrictions were removed in South Asia and in the Middle East and North Africa, these two regions reformed the least. Another major innovation in the report is new data on the existence and scope of laws on two areas of violence against women: sexual harassment and domestic violence. Covering 100 economies, the data show that prohibitions against sexual harassment in the workplace are widespread - 78 economies have legislation and over half of these criminalize the behavior. Legislation on domestic violence is also widespread - 76 economies have laws prohibiting domestic violence. The region with the fewest laws on domestic violence is the Middle East and North Africa. The report shows lower gender legal parity is associated with fewer women participating in firm ownership, while policies encouraging women to join and remain in the labor force are associated with greater income equality. Even though the report offers signs of improvement for womens economic opportunities globally, it shows economies can do more to ensure womens participation in economic life. About the Women, Business and the Law Report series: Women, Business and the Law measures how laws, regulations and institutions differentiate between women and men in ways that may affect womens incentives or capacity to work or to set up and run a business. It analyzes legal differences on the basis of gender in 143 economies, covering six areas: gaining access to institutions, using property, getting a job, providing incentives to work, building credit, and going to court. The project provides a clear picture of gender gaps based on legal differences in each economy, but it does not capture the full extent of the gender gap, nor does it indicate the relative importance of each aspect covered. This years report was published by Bloomsbury Publishing. About the World Bank Group: The World Bank Group is one of the worlds largest sources of funding and development expertise for developing countries. 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