

## Transforming social norms for women's political participation, representation and leadership

### Expert Group Meeting Report

4-5 February 2025 | Brussels, Belgium and online



## ABOUT THE MEETING

UN Women, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) are jointly implementing the European Union-funded *Women and Youth Democratic Engagement Programme (WYDE) | Women's Leadership Initiative* through a programme entitled: 'Advancing Women's Political Participation and Decision-Making through Social Norms Change, Networking and Global Advocacy'. The WYDE | Women's Leadership Initiative will prioritise social norm work and enhance synergies between women's rights movements, decision makers, the international community, the media, and other key actors. To this end, UN Women organised an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on 'Transforming social norms for women's political participation and leadership' in Brussels and online from 4 to 5 February 2025 with the main aim of supporting the development of a framework on social norms related to women's political participation. The framework will contribute to women's overall work on social norms and inform UN Women and partners' programmes within WYDE.

This report, prepared by Brenda K. Kombo, UN Women consultant on social norms, summarises the EGM presentations and highlights key takeaways from the discussions which will inform the development of the framework on social norms.

UN Women extends its gratitude to all the contributors to this EGM (see the list of experts and participants). We pay tribute to and recognise the late Prof. Laila El Baradei, who tragically passed away on 18 April 2025. Her contributions enriched the EGM, and she will be greatly missed.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>AI</b>	Artificial intelligence
<b>BOP</b>	Balance of Power
<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organisation
<b>CSW</b>	Commission on the Status of Women
<b>EGM</b>	Expert Group Meeting
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EU GAP III</b>	European Union Gender Action Plan III
<b>GEWE</b>	Gender equality and women's empowerment
<b>International IDEA</b>	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
<b>IPU</b>	Inter-Parliamentary Union
<b>MP</b>	Member of Parliament
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SIGI</b>	Social Institutions and Gender Index
<b>TSM</b>	Temporary special measure
<b>UCLG</b>	United Cities and Local Governments
<b>WILAN</b>	Women in Leadership Advancement Network
<b>WYDE</b>	Women and Youth Democratic Engagement

## Session 1: Opening session

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*'We all, I think, know that if we don't tackle stereotypes, if we don't tackle pervasive social norms, we will not move the needle [on gender equality], particularly in this time.'* - Ms. Florence Raes, Director, UN Women Brussels Liaison Office

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### MODERATOR: Ms. Estela Bulku, Programme Manager, WYDE, UN Women

**Ms. Florence Raes, Director, UN Women Brussels Liaison Office** opened the meeting by emphasising the importance of addressing social norms in gender equality efforts, particularly in light of the pressure that the global backlash is putting on the gains that have been made towards achieving gender equality. Underscoring that these gains are often only visible when one disaggregates the data and looks at more localised communities, she suggested that gender equality advocates have seen some positive impact of their work in the lives of women and girls. There are contexts in which gender-responsive budgets exist or where more gender egalitarian legislation has been passed. Nevertheless, the benefits are yet to be fully realised and there is need for more work to convince decision makers that being 'gender blind is not the way to go'. Ms. Raes appreciated WYDE | Women's Leadership Initiative's innovative and necessary approach through its focus on social norms. At the same time, she highlighted the importance of networking and providing funding to women's organisations, which are also key components of the Initiative. In closing, Ms. Raes extended her gratitude to the European Union (EU) for enabling UN Women and its partners to undertake their joint work within the WYDE programme.

**Ms. Lina Andeer, Policy Officer, Gender Equality Directorate General for International Partnerships INTPA G1 – Gender Equality, Human Rights and Democratic Governance; European Commission** reflected on the progress that she has witnessed in gender mainstreaming within the EU over the last

10 years. Gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) remains on top of the EU agenda and Gender Action Plan (GAP) III, which will be in place until the end of 2027, is the EU's 'most ambitious framework thus far'. While focus is on full implementation of the framework, the 2024-2029 Commission's Roadmap for Women's Rights was rolled out on 6 March 2025.<sup>1</sup> Women's political participation is one of the priority areas of the framework, which has three cross-cutting principles, namely, intersectionality, a gender-transformative approach, and a human rights-based approach. Recognising that GEWE expertise is not equally distributed within organisations, Ms. Andeer noted the importance of critically reflecting on our work and providing guidance—an opportunity afforded by the EGM. An example from Kosovo, where she was working 15 years came to mind. At the time, women in a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) demanded greater representation of women in village politics and successfully secured a local quota of 35 percent women in village councils. Ms. Andeer affirmed that the EGM would provide an opportunity to think about lessons from inspiring examples from different places and to identify the key elements required for change in particular contexts. Ms. Andeer ended by expressing the EU's enthusiasm for the partnership within the WYDE programme.

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<sup>1</sup> Announced during the EGM meeting.



Lina Andeer, Policy Officer, DG International Partnerships, European Commission. Photo: UN Women/Nejm Halla

**Ms. Julie Ballington, Global Policy Advisor on Women’s Political Participation, UN Women** who was introduced by the Moderator as ‘the brain and heart’ of the programme, described how the WYDE | Women’s Leadership Initiative came about and situated it within the context of previous work on women’s political participation. Ms. Ballington marvelled at how almost 25 years since the first EGM on temporary special measures (TSMs) and quotas, another group of experts was gathering to once again discuss women’s political participation. Referring to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and other normative frameworks supporting efforts to promote women’s participation in decision making, she recognised the role that TSMs, capacity building, work with women’s rights organisations, support to Member States, and other

initiatives have played in advancing women’s political participation. At the same time, she cited Ester Boserup who supported UN Women’s work on quotas and used to emphasise that quotas were a shortcut to equality and that they bypass culture and social norms rather than take on the difficulty of changing them. Ms. Ballington observed that this idea has underpinned work on women’s political participation for the last 30 years. Although some of the women’s political participation work, including within UN Women, has touched on social norm change, it has not really delved into it in depth.

However, as the partners were designing the WYDE programme, it became clear that a focus on social norms was essential and, as such, greater clarity was needed on how the partners were defining social norms and how they were going to measure them in the programme. It was agreed that an EGM would help define social norms in order to ensure results through the programme. The EGM thus came about in parallel with ongoing work within UN Women on social norms. Ms. Ballington explained that Ms. Paro Chaujar has been working to help UN Women define social norms, develop measurement tools, and develop a broader framework which will inform the organisation’s next strategic plan. The EGM provides an opportunity for a diverse group of scholars and practitioners to bring this work together and think both about how to understand and measure social norms within the programme and within society at large.

Providing an overview of the two-day agenda, Ms. Ballington highlighted the planned discussions for each of the EGM’s eight sessions. The focus of the first day would be on unpacking social norms and how they operate within political institutions and other spheres or domains. The second day would focus on more practical ways forward.

## Session 2: Overview of social norms and materialisation across spheres

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*'We see productive and reproductive activities as governed by structures of constraints, the distribution of rules, norms, assets, identities and interests which vary across countries and regions. But we also see that the economy has to be seen as interconnected between states, households, and civil society.'* - Prof. Emerita Naila Kabeer, London School of Economics

*'Social norms shape "what is to be done, how it is to be done, who does it, and who benefits".'* – Ms. Paro Chaujar, Policy Advisor on Social Norms, UN Women

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### SESSION OVERVIEW:

Women's right to equal political participation and representation is well entrenched in international normative frameworks, with the Beijing Platform for Action adopted 30 years ago. However, this right is far from realised at any level of government, with discriminatory social norms widely viewed as the major impediment. Discriminatory norms are deployed to prevent women realising their political rights and prevent implementation of global normative frameworks. This session examined different approaches to understanding and addressing social norms, including individualist and structural approaches, and considered their implications for inclusive and transformative work. Moreover, participants considered the relationship between social norms and different domains/spheres<sup>2</sup>, how discriminatory social norms hold women back, and how egalitarian norms might advance women's political participation and representation.

### MODERATOR: Prof. Sonia Palmieri, Australian National University

#### INTERVENTIONS BY PANELISTS:

**Prof. Emerita Naila Kabeer, London School of Economics** began by noting that despite her disagreement with how human capabilities like health are defined and measured, World Economic Forum Reports suggest that the most progress has been made in closing the gender gap with regard to health and education, while gender gaps in the economic domain remain large and those in the political domain are even larger. She contended that these differences are due to the varying configurations of actors and power in the different domains, with the political domain being where decisions are made.

Outlining three different levels of analysis of barriers to gender equality, Prof. Emerita Kabeer described the macro or societal level as a broad structural level and the intermediate level as the level of institutions or, in other words, 'where routinised practices,

routinised interpretations of the rules and norms of societies get interpreted and govern the way that we behave in different spheres of society'. She further described the micro level as one where individuals and groups make choices and exercise agency which might reproduce or challenge overarching structures. However, she noted the importance of recognising that individual beliefs and values might diverge from social norms, thereby resulting in a change in practice, or that changes in practice could lead to questioning of social norms. While people make choices and exercise agency, they do so within structures of norms and constraints. At the same time, since gender interacts with other forms of inequality, such as race and class, intersectionality is critical to the analysis.

Drawing on Ann Whitehead's distinction between 'intrinsic relations of gender' and 'gender-bearing relations', Prof. Emerita Kabeer described the

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<sup>2</sup> Domains/spheres considered included the family, community, religion, political arena, market, and cyber sphere.

former as relations of what might be referred to as informal institutions such as the family or community which 'define the dominant models of masculinity and femininity within particular societies' while the latter are reflected in states, markets, and civil society 'when they reflect and reinforce preconceived notions of masculinity and femininity as routine aspects of their rules, procedures, and practices'. One of the most common intrinsic gender constraints is women's and girls' disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work, but other constraints are more context specific. Prof. Emerita Kabeer also highlighted how intrinsically gendered relations of family and kinship are reflected in dynastic leadership particularly in the case of women's leadership in many contexts including Argentina, Bangladesh, Canada, Egypt, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the United States.

**Dr. Brenda Kombo, UN Women Consultant** provided a background on social norm work pertaining to women's political participation based on the EGM background paper. Social norms are complex and social norm work is being conducted across a wide range of disciplines, but often with little cross-pollination. However, Dr. Kombo suggested that the shared understanding of social norms is that they are unwritten rules that define appropriate behaviour in a specific context. Despite some variations across geographies, the literature review and interviews conducted for the background paper suggested that two norms pertaining to women's political participation were shared across multiple contexts. One was the characterisation of politics as a male domain and the second was women's role as homemakers and caregivers. The research also identified some norms that can facilitate women's political participation and highlighted the interplay between social norms seen as directly implicated in women's political participation and those underlying tolerance of gender-based violence.

Three theoretical approaches to social norms were reflected in the research and briefly described in the presentation. These are: (1) social norms theory which posits that social norms reside within an individual's mind and guide their behaviour; (2) a structural and institutional orientation which recognises that while social norms may reside within the mind, they are shaped, reproduced, and enforced by but also contested within social institutions; and (3) a decolonial (feminist) orientation which seeks to identify inclusive, non-patriarchal, and non-capitalist alternatives to patriarchal Western notions of leadership. Although the first approach is dominant in the international development field, Dr. Kombo described the appeal and critiques of each of the approaches while also leaving open the possibility of some overlap between them and of utilising other approaches. However, she emphasised that one key difference between the two main competing approaches is that social norms theory presents changing social norms primarily as a technical process and the structural/institutional approach presents it as a political one.

Dr. Kombo suggested that four pathways to changing social norms emerged from the research. These were: (1) the work of women's and feminist movements and civil society organisations (CSOs); (2) broader initiatives to support gender equality such as education, healthcare, and access to resources; (3) training and capacity building when done in combination with other activities aimed at inducing structural change; and (4) a combination of unrelated and often unpredictable factors which complicate social engineering. She concluded with some reflections on considerations for the WYDE programme including regarding the importance of context and diversity, ethical concerns, backlash, the importance of considering other levers of change, and the implications of the digital age.

**Ms. Paro Chaujar, Policy Advisor on Social Norms, UN Women** presented the first part of UN Women's Framework on social norms which is a conceptual framework that tackles the question 'How do we understand social norms?' The Framework is rooted in feminist principles and seeks to bring power into the conversation on social norms. Although UN Women had been working on social norms change, it lacked an explicit outcome until this was introduced into the 2022-2025 strategic plan. The mainstream discourse on social norms in international development focused on behaviour and attitude change, but UN Women decided to begin by better understanding social norms and how change comes about. In this process, the organisation conducted a literature review on the state of social norm scholarship and then commissioned five papers from scholars and practitioners in the Global South (i.e., Brazil, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Fiji, and India) in order to learn from scholar practitioners who were leading change on the ground. The papers were then the subject of an EGM in October 2023, which made several findings. These included: (1) the knowledge divide between the Global North and South in social norms work; and (2) the need for what one of the scholars called a 'layered institutional analysis that looked at how different institutions across domains interacted to produce the social' aspect of norms. The EGM also made several recommendations, including that: (1) the analysis of power and the relationship between institutions, especially of the state, market and religion, needed to be central to the analysis of social norms; (2) context matters and although we can learn from various principles and approaches, there is no one silver bullet; (3) the measurement question was itself political and colonial; and (4) UN Women should centre the voices and perspectives of feminists.

Ms. Chaujar went on to explain how social norms were defined based on the research and

consultations. The experts described social norms basically as ideological rules based on an organised set of beliefs. Social norms justify discrimination on account of nature, divine will, or merit. Moreover, social norms were understood to be embedded in institutions. Borrowing from Naila Kabeer, the Framework focused on the market, state, community, and family. The framework also understood social norms to be about power. As such, '[s]ocial norms implicated in gender equality and women's empowerment are embedded rules, standards or practices that **structure relationships between people and social institutions**...based on intersecting social hierarchies, including patriarchy'. This proposed definition uses social norms instead of gender norms to emphasise that social norms based on other intersecting identities like caste, race, class, sexuality, etc. can influence GEWE.

**Ms. Julia Meier zu Selhausen, Planning Officer Gender Equality, GIZ** provided a brief overview of the concept note that the EU Working Group on Gender Transformative Approaches has developed. As a co-facilitator of the group along with Lina Andeer, she explained that the concept note emerged from recognition of the need to clarify what gender transformative approaches are. The concept note provides a continuum of approaches to achieving gender equality ranging from 'exploitative' at one end to 'responsive' and 'transformative' on the other. Unlike gender-responsive approaches which address symptoms of gender equality, gender-transformative approaches address underlying root causes. Nevertheless, Ms. Meier zu Selhausen suggested that which of these two approaches is taken will vary depending on the context and often some combination of both may be necessary.

As elaborated in the concept note, change is required in four domains (individual, relational, cultural, and within systems and structures) in order for transformation to happen. Adapting the concept

note's four quadrants of change to focus on promoting women's public and political participation, Ms. Meier zu Selhausen suggested that initiatives can build capacities and self-esteem at the individual level, work with male champions, engage with the community and through the media on social norms, support women within social movements, and support women's representation in formal institutions through new policies and processes.

Drawing on an example of child marriage, Ms. Meier zu Selhausen contended that the root causes of child marriage can include '**discriminatory laws** as well as deeply embedded **beliefs and norms**'. She emphasised that even where individuals might not agree with the practice, it is sustained by '**social pressure to conform with gender norms** to prevent social exclusion and economic disadvantage'. Consequently, social norm change initiatives should include intergenerational dialogues and public forums and spaces where people can reflect on gender norms and gain a better sense of the possible gap between personal convictions and social norms.

Ms. Meier zu Selhausen shared a checklist for programming which highlights the need for strategic partnerships, engagement of a critical mass, long-term engagement, and measurement of contributions. In closing, she highlighted elements of the GIZ Self-Assessment Tool for Gender-Transformative Approaches and provided some examples of the differences between programming that is gender responsive versus gender transformative.

#### PLENARY DISCUSSION:

The plenary discussion covered: theoretical approaches to social norms, differences in terminology, the origin and entrenchment of social norms, social norm change, as well as some

pragmatic considerations for WYDE's work, among other topics.

**Theoretical approaches to social norms** – Taking the presentations into account, the experts acknowledged the differences in various approaches to social norms theory and structural or institutional approaches (presented as behavioural versus institutional approaches), but they did not agree on whether this would significantly affect the work. The two approaches can also overlap or complement each other, as social norms theory considers culturally shaped expectations and the broader context, not just individual behaviour. Some experts questioned the validity of behavioural approaches, pointing out that they often reflect perspectives from research in the Global North studying communities in the Global South, sometimes without fully addressing the structural or institutional factors. Following this, several experts expressed concern about knowledge production to ensure that there is scholarship from the Global South and developing any framework for social norms change through a consultative approach.

The politics of knowledge production also concerned measurement of social norm change as reflected in a series of questions posed: What kind of change matters? What does that change mean? How do you capture it? (*See session 7*)

**Differences in terminology** – The experts noted meaningful differences in the use of terminology and paid particular attention to the use of 'institutions' or 'social institutions', and 'institutionalisation'. Some thought that reference to an 'institutional' approach to social norms might be confusing since in political science, for example, entities such as legislatures, political parties, or government bureaucracies are understood to be formal institutions while informal institutions might be referred to as 'cultural institutions'. Others thought that it was important to use 'institution' in

order to provide ‘the sense that it is a sphere or domain where long-established ways of doing things have become the norm’. The word can be used to help capture how norms ‘take root’, ‘become established’, or are made ‘normal or into things that we should be accepting’. However, experts also referred to social institutions as domains or spheres.

**Origins and entrenchment of social norms** – The experts stressed that if there is agreement (in the behaviourist view) that social norms exist in people’s minds, it is important to note that they don’t just appear there on their own. Therefore, it is necessary to explore how these ideas of norms are formed – such through the role of spheres like families, schools, and religious organizations in shaping and reinforcing social norms. Further, experts emphasized the connection of social norms as social constructs. In addition, drawing on the feminist idea that ‘the personal is political’, it was suggested that women leaders and activists should reflect on how they might, even unintentionally, contribute to reinforcing some social norms. Further, social norms are mirrored back in societal institutions such as education and parliament.

**Social norm change** – The discussion on changing social norms focused on how to encourage people to question and challenge existing social norms to create change. Some experts, drawing on the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, reflected on the concept of turning norms from *doxa*—understood as the taken-for-granted, unquestioned beliefs—to discourse, where these norms are brought into the public sphere to be debated and examined. This shift can be supported through channels such as public media (e.g. radio), formal education delivered by well-trained teachers, local level dialogues, among other participatory initiatives.

**Pragmatic considerations for WYDE’s work** - The discussion’s key points included the need to clarify the ultimate audience for the WYDE framework, how or if it’s recommended for women leaders to engage with or lean into stereotypes, and how WYDE partners can leverage existing policies and initiatives to strengthen their work.

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Social norms are unwritten rules rooted in power, embedded in institutions, and enforced unevenly based on social identities like gender, race, class, or caste. Norms around women’s political participation include characterisation of politics as a male domain and women’s role as caregivers.**
- **While some social norms, like women’s responsibility for unpaid care, are common across multiple contexts, others are context specific. Norms around money vary widely, for example, in Asia there are both contexts where women are expected to handle money and others where this is a taboo.**
- **Social norms have real world implications; and do not simply exist in people’s minds. They become embedded within various domains, such as the family, political institutions, and religion. Examining these processes helps shift social norms from implicit rules to subjects of public debate so that they can be deconstructed and contested.**
- **Approaches to understanding how social norms manifest are not universally agreed upon as norms are inherently specific to their context.**
- **Approaches to social norms change may risk exploitation and therefore, approaches must ensure they are working through a gender responsive or gender transformative approach, or a combination of both depending on context.**

- **Considering a bottom-up approach to knowledge production is crucial for enabling co-creation of a framework with actors at the local level.**



*Photo captions: (Left) Naila Kabeer, Professor Emerita, London School of Economics and Politics. (Right) Sonia Palmieri Head of the Department of Pacific Affairs, Coral Bell School of Asia and Pacific Affairs, College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University.*

*Photos: UN Womne/ Nejm Halla*

### Session 3: What are the main spheres, systems and structures in which social norms are embedded in political life?

*'We can encourage women to see themselves as political actors, but politics as a male domain is not just about the who. It's not just about the great men in politics, but it's also about how politics works and how politics is done.'*

Prof. Jennifer Piscopo, Prof. of Politics and Gender, Royal Holloway University of London

*'As long as there are no changes in social norms, the real redistribution of power and privileges that we believe should be a democratic imperative will not happen.'* – Ms. Rumbidzai Kandawasvika-Nhundu, International IDEA

#### SESSION OVERVIEW:

Social norms can be understood in relation to different spheres, e.g. the family, state, community, economy and cyber sphere. These spheres are important for shaping, reinforcing, and maintaining social norms, but also are key to challenging and changing social norms. In this way, they contribute to both making social norms 'social' (meaning that they are also not natural or innate and are shared across a group) and making them 'norms' (in the sense that they are embedded, formalised, or legitimised). Presentations during this session considered where social norms are embedded and/or contested in relation to political participation and attempted to define what specific narratives are perpetuated to constrain women's political participation.

**MODERATOR:** Julie Ballington, Global Policy Advisor on Women's Political Participation, UN Women

#### INTERVENTIONS BY PANELISTS:

**Prof. Jennifer Piscopo, Prof. of Politics and Gender, Royal Holloway University of London** presented research that she is undertaking with other colleagues on 'how national narratives about politics inscribe the norm of politics as a male domain into the public imagination'. The research examines how country origin stories tend to mythologise great men and how the narrative that politics is a space in which great men achieve great things is produced and reproduced in monuments, museums, money, and other sites where the great men are celebrated. Prof. Piscopo proposed that the social norm of politics as a male domain matters for the following three reasons: (1) it shapes who sees themselves as a political actor; (2) it explains the 'stickiness' of parties' and voters' beliefs that women are not viable political actors; and (3) it shows how policy incentives designed to change gendered social norms are actually interacting with the norms and might not produce the desired outcomes.



Jennifer Piscopo, Professor of Gender and Politics Royal Holloway, University of London. Photo: UN Women / Nejm Halla.

Prof. Piscopo and her colleagues created survey experiments using short videos of civics lessons which they developed. One showcased founding fathers of the United States of America and another presented a more inclusive version which showcased well-known women from the same period along with some of the founding fathers. They found that men's ambition to run for office increased and women's ambition decreased when they saw the founding fathers' video and that women's ambition only rose slightly and men's fell significantly when they saw the more inclusive video. This suggests that changing national narratives can reshape who sees themselves as being able to act in the political arena. At the same time, Prof. Piscopo argued that interventions aimed at increasing women's ambition to run for office are insufficient because politics are structured to work for men, and political parties know this. Analysis of a Chilean law that sought to financially incentivise parties, donors, banks, and women candidates to invest in women's campaigns confirmed the stickiness of the idea that women are not viable political candidates. Despite the incentives, all the targeted actors, including women themselves, contributed less to women's campaigns except in some cases where the women were incumbents. Prof. Piscopo revealed that the challenge begins in the household where men are seen to be 'naturally' suited to politics and as legitimately investing in their campaigns whereas women's investments are seen as selfish. She concluded that even though policy interventions are an important lever to change social norms, they interact with these norms. It is insufficient to change beliefs and ideas about women because structures still matter.

**Dr. Amalia Álvarez-Benjumea, Ramón y Cajal Research Fellow, Institute of Public Goods and Policies, Spanish National Research Council** centred her presentation on how the power of social norms might be harnessed to create safer online spaces where women can participate in public debates.

Despite the importance of the internet as a tool for political participation, hate speech and misogyny pose a direct threat to women's participation. Focusing specifically on gender-based hate speech, Dr. Álvarez-Benjumea provided examples of recent social media posts targeting Margarita Robles, Spain's Minister of Defence and suggesting that she does not belong in politics. She also shared a graph depicting the spike in hate speech after the election of Donald Trump. The fear of such online hate and harassment may discourage women from expressing themselves online and engaging in political behaviour. Yet, 'social media distorts perceptions of norms' by generating norms that are more extreme than those that exist offline and creating a false sense of polarisation.

Research suggests that the more people are exposed to prejudice online, the more likely they are to express prejudice themselves. Characterising this as a process of normalisation of hate speech, Dr. Álvarez-Benjumea shared the results of her preliminary research indicating that counterspeech reduces the use of hate speech and, consequently, helps establish the norm against hate speech.

**Ms. Rumbidzai Kandawasvika-Nhundu, International IDEA** built on other inputs which she regarded as interconnected with and relevant to her presentation on social norms in relation to democracy. Defining social norms as 'prescriptions in terms of what is expected of women and what is expected of men', she emphasised that the entrenchment of social norms which negate and prevent women's equal participation and representation begins in the family and then is manifested in the public sphere through institutions that should support democracy building including political parties, electoral processes and institutions, and the media. At an individual level, we need to reflect on how we might influence transformation within our families. More broadly, social norms inform narratives such as those we hear in political

parties, for example, regarding how women ‘are our mothers, daughters, and sisters’. Another example is media narratives questioning the fairness of quotas without considering why they have been put in place.

Social norms come into play in each of the stages of the electoral cycle. For example, women have unequal access to resources for political campaigns. Within parties, the processes of identification, nomination, and selection of candidates are loaded with narratives such as whether women are competent or if they have merit. Yet, men’s competence is assumed. Social norms are entrenched in patriarchy and become ‘a non-monetary resource’ for men. They cut across different spheres, institutions, platforms, and establishment. Contending that social norms result in the failure for women’s participation to be translated into representation in terms of having voice and influence, Ms. Kandawasvika-Nhundu characterised social norm change as a process of redistributing power and privileges. This is what makes it difficult. Consequently, Ms. Kandawasvika-Nhundu proposed that we interrogate social norms from an ‘access, participation, representation, and transformative approach’. This entails considering how social norms block women’s access, their voice once they enter these spaces, their ability to make a difference, and the transformation of unequal power relations that perpetuate gender-based disparities.

**Mr. Oyedolapo Babatunde Durojaye** presented a paper which examines how social norms impede women’s political participation and leadership and recommends interventions to boost their political engagement. He referenced statistics on the representation of women in parliaments to show that despite higher rates of participation in the Nordic region, women generally have unequal representation rates worldwide. Defining social norms as ‘the unwritten rules governing societal

behaviour’ and characterising gender norms as a subset of social norms, Mr. Durojaye suggested that these norms include the view that women are caregivers and that only men engage in politics. In other words, there is a sexual division of labour as well as a sexual division of power. He asserted that public campaigns, education, and mobilisation should be used to help women understand that they too can and should take up positions of authority.

#### PLENARY DISCUSSION:

Key themes emerged, including the interplay between structural barriers, the power of narratives and counternarratives, men’s resistance to changing social norms, and potential strategies for encouraging these changes.

**Women’s agency and structural barriers** – The discussion began with some reflection on women’s agency. Some experts highlighted the importance of overcoming women’s internalised barriers through actively stepping into leadership roles. Others noted that no matter how much effort an individual woman can make, their agency is often constrained by structural barriers which limit their opportunities. For instance, experts agreed that norms are sustained because people conform to them and think these norms are expected of them. Barriers discussed included unequal access to resources and women’s historical erasure from politics. Regarding resources, experts explored the inherent role played by norms in allocating resources, such as the notion that ‘norms carry with them who gets resources and who doesn’t’. As such, several experts underscored that despite the importance of building women’s capacity for leadership, ‘systems need to change, not the women’.

**Narratives and counternarratives** – The importance of counternarratives was a recurring theme. Drawing on the idea of speech and counterspeech and echoing the UN Women Framework, the

discussion focused on ways to utilize both to drive changes in social norms. experts considered existing narratives, such as women’s underlying assumed status as mothers and daughters, and contemplated how they might be ‘flipped’ or countered. They agreed that transforming narratives requires collective action. Additionally, new technologies featured in the discussion such as harnessing the power of artificial intelligence (AI) to counter harmful online narratives about women in politics.

**Men’s resistance** – Considering the social norms pointing to politics largely being a male-dominated arena, the discussion touched on how some men politicians view women’s presence in political leadership spaces as disruptive. These men perceive women’s political leadership as posing a threat to their privilege. Therefore, counternarratives need to include encouraging women to take the space as

well as the potential for gender equality trainings with men to drive forward the notion that it is not a question of losing privilege, but of making space.

**Potential strategies for changing social norms** – Community dialogues, interventions to address structural barriers, and alliances with men politicians were all proposed as potential social norm change strategies. Community dialogues, such as some which were conducted in remote communities in Vanuatu, can provide an opportunity for women to directly counter the claims men make about women’s political participation. Interventions to address structural barriers include quotas and political party initiatives. For instance, expanding narratives showing real change can help, such as when the quality of men put forward for elections improved when women’s representation increased.

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **The social norm of politics being a male domain has consequences because it (1) influences who approaches/benefits from political engagement; (2) sustains biases against women as credible political candidates; and (3) undermines well-intentioned policies to promote women’s political participation, representation, and leadership when those policies fail to directly confront the underlying social norms.**
- **The social norm of politics as a male domain is produced and perpetuated in part through country origin stories mythologising “great” men.**
- **Counterspeech—which was also referred to as counternarratives, flipping the narrative, transforming narratives, or myth busting—is an important strategy for challenging social norms.**
- **With the increase of online violence against women in politics, including hate speech and harassment, counterspeech can encourage narratives to be deconstructed by the people who they impact the most.**
- **Social norms operate as an advantage for men in all stages of the electoral cycle.**
- **Capacity building of women politicians needs to be accompanied by initiatives targeting the structural barriers that they face, rather than solely focusing on individual effort.**
- **Social norm work must grapple with men’s fear of losing power and privileges as women’s participation and representation increase.**
- **Social norm work should aim to improve women’s participation and representation and bring about structural transformation by challenging the unequal power relations that perpetuate gender-based disparities.**

## Session 4: How social norms affect women's political participation: the role of socialisation & political institutions

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*'The local scale is the proximity scale. Local representatives are the most likely to know if their citizens' issues are treated or not, and how they are treated, and to act on it. Local women leaders, especially those who have struggled to access responsibility, keep the door wide open for others most of the time, and for engaging women in civic expression. That, in turn, enables more women to become politically involved.'* - Ms. Elise Pereira Nunes, Deputy Mayor of Tours for Gender Equality, International Relations and City Networks

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### SESSION OVERVIEW:

This session explored the ways that norms have practical impacts on the political engagement of women and girls. This included discussions of how the socialisation of gender norms has real implications for women's roles in leadership and political participation. Drawing on experiences from parliaments, councils and within political parties, the session also considered how these institutions influence social norms. What are the specific narratives? What myths need to be 'busted'?

### MODERATOR: Mariana Duarte Mutzenberg, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

#### INTERVENTIONS BY PANELISTS:

##### **Ms. Elise Pereira Nunes, Deputy Mayor of Tours for Gender Equality, International Relations and City Networks** based her remarks

on a future envisioning exercise in which women mayors and representatives participated. Speaking on behalf of these participants, Ms. Pereira Nunes highlighted the importance of local authorities worldwide in achieving the 2030 agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and particularly SDG 5. Local government provides an important avenue through which women can get involved in politics and many women have begun their political careers through their engagement in community work in local formal or informal associations. Ms. Pereira Nunes shared her own career path which began in academia, transitioned to NGO work, and then led to encouragement by local political leaders to join them. She noted that research suggests that women's increased participation at the city or local level translates into increased 'opportunities and channels of social participation for women and neglected groups'.

Ms. Pereira Nunes made several key points that drew on her experience. First, she shared the example of local youth assemblies and other bodies that have been established in her city of Tours in order to foster democratic participation and ensure equal gender representation. Second, she recognised gains in gender parity in France but also indicated that there are still challenges with parity in executive positions. Moreover, gender stereotypes are still reflected in how work is delegated to women and men leaders. Third, Ms. Pereira Nunes highlighted an initiative to provide childcare for elected representatives. Additionally, she underscored the way that her city uses its budget to promote gender equality by supporting local feminist organisations as well as through public investments in things like making schoolyards more gender inclusive and climate resilient and a campaign called 'The Street is Ours, too' which invited residents to propose illustrious women who would be honoured by naming streets or other public spaces after them. In concluding remarks, Ms. Pereira Nunes emphasised the importance of city-to-city cooperation and networks in not only making her participation in the EGM possible as a member

of the Feminist Municipal Movement, but in providing opportunities to learn from experiences advancing gender equality and apply good practices.

**Ms. Emma Muteka, Member of Parliament, Namibia** recounted the story of how she decided to run for office despite opposition from one of her uncles and despite having to initially run against five men, all of whom had been her teachers. Her father supported her decision but was right when he told her that this was only the beginning of the challenges she would face, particularly as she later went on to become the youngest regional councillor, among the youngest Members of Parliament (MPs), and one of only five women in a House with 42 members. These challenges included sexual advances and limitations other MPs imposed on her participation in certain discussions or in delegations.

Focusing on Parliament's efforts to address gender inequality, Ms. Muteka spoke about a self-assessment exercise that it conducted together with the IPU in 2018. A few of the recommendations that emerged from the assessment were: to ensure application of the gender parity principle to committee membership and to build capacity of women members in order for them to be more comfortable speaking on the floor of the House and to the media. Ms. Muteka suggested that media interviews are particularly difficult for many women politicians because they know that backlash will ensue. The assessment also encouraged political parties to favour women's participation. Her party, which is the ruling party, was the only one to adopt a zebra style system in which 50 per cent of candidates must be men and 50 per cent women. This has increased the number of women represented while also increasing the competitiveness among men candidates in the nomination process as had been mentioned in a previous comment. The Deputy Speaker, Vice Chairperson, and President of the country are now

women and other increases in representation have been witnessed in the public service since 2018.

Ms. Muteka outlined other measures Parliament has put into place which may contribute to social norm change. These included motions pertaining to women's maternity leave, removing tax on sanitary pads, amending the Domestic Violence Act, and installing feeding bays in the Parliament building. She contended that women need to be more supportive of each other and to build their capacity in order to take on political roles.

**Prof. Angie Bos, Dean and Professor, School of Public Service, Boise State University** shared findings from research that she has been conducting over the last seven or eight years which analyses what children think about politics and the intersection of processes of gender and political socialisation. Prof. Bos and her colleagues refer to the way in which gender gaps in politics take root as a process of 'gendered political socialisation'. This takes place within homes and schools as well as through children's exposure to gender and politics through the media. Children come to see politics as a masculine domain and associate leadership roles with men. While boys are encouraged to be competitive, independent, and assertive, girls are encouraged to be nurturing and value their appearance. Consequently, Prof. Bos and her colleagues argue that gender and political socialisation happen simultaneously, thereby discouraging girls from having political ambition.

The research team asked 1,600 children aged 6 to 12 across the United States to draw a political leader and then answer questions about them. They found that the view of politics as male and masculine strengthened with age, particularly for girls. This was accompanied by a decrease in girls' political ambition. These gender gaps are consequential for gender representation and equity because they persist in adulthood. Nevertheless, Prof. Bos

emphasised that despite the strength of stereotypes, they can change, particularly as women take on more leadership roles. She concluded that takeaways from her work include that we should talk differently about political leadership within the classroom, the media, our homes, and other spaces and that we should increase children's access to diverse role models.

**Dr. Lilian Soto, Founder of the Network of Municipal Women of Paraguay** based her presentation on research that she has been conducting in Paraguay and Latin America over the last two decades as well as on her personal experience as a politician. Describing political parties as a link between society and political power, Dr. Soto showcased the role that they can play in transforming social norms. She drew on Giovanni Sartori's notion of 'valuable leadership' and suggested that political parties should promote such leadership which is characterised, among other things, by its defence of equality, inclusion, diversity, and gender equality. Dr. Soto identified the gender social norms that political parties should challenge as: the sexual division of labour, feminine desirable traits such as being quiet and remaining unnoticed, feminine mandates limiting women to wifehood and motherhood, women's obligation to prioritise family harmony and happiness above all else, and tolerance of gender violence.

However, Dr. Soto recognised that most political parties are not inclined to change social norms. They largely maintain a sexist culture, replicate the gendered division of labour, maintain dominant masculine aesthetic styles, engage in limited debate about the challenges of women's political participation, and fail to design mechanisms to overcome these. She thus recommended the following: (1) diverse women party officials and members should identify the gendered norms that exist within the parties; (2) women politicians should work with feminist movements to engage

parties in changing social norms; (3) men and women should be given equal responsibilities within parties; and (4) parties should establish internal protocols and mechanisms to address sexual harassment and political gender violence.

#### PLENARY DISCUSSION:

**The role of political institutions** – Political institutions like parliaments, political parties, and local governments are influential in changing social norms. Institutions should lead by example and enact legislation, introduce policy change, and address informal rules in order to enhance women's political participation, representation, and leadership. Quotas, initiatives to promote women's economic empowerment, promotion of equal care work responsibilities, and solidarity between cities to promote gender-sensitive budgeting and other transformative initiatives were a few examples discussed.

**Social norms embedded within political institutions** - Experts highlighted how social norms are deeply entrenched within institutions. They discussed the possible gap that can exist between what institutions say and what they actually do, especially when it comes to being gender-sensitive. The importance of political will was emphasised, however, it was also noted that strong social norms can make real change difficult. Key exchanges unpacked the potential tension between social and institutional norms. For example, parliaments may try to follow more equal, gender-inclusive values, but this can clash with long-standing practices like adversarial debate or the norm of free speech, which can work against women.

**Socialization** – Socialization was a key topic of debate as well as in session 5. Experts emphasized that understanding how people are socialized is essential to explaining how social norms take hold – particularly how women can also end up absorbed

by patriarchal ways of thinking. For instance, the experts themselves discussed the common narratives like “women don’t support other women” and how these narratives should be challenged as they continue to uphold patriarchal thinking. Therefore, they highlighted the importance of looking beyond the sphere of the family to the role of peer groups and wider society in shaping how children learn gendered ideas about leadership.



*Lilian Soto, Founder of the Network of Municipal Women of Paraguay.  
Photo: UN Women / Nejm Halla*

**Challenges of social norm change** - Challenges emerged, such as the possibility of social norm change work being unsuccessful or resulting in backlash. However, conversations highlighted the ways structural inequalities limit women’s ability to participate and feed into the norms and potential backlash. For instance, addressing the concept that women may? not vote for other women isn’t necessarily due to a lack of solidarity, but because male candidates often have more resources, stronger networks and are seen as better equipped to serve their communities.

Experts were keenly aware of the fact that social norms are often resistant to change and, as such, social norm change work might be unsuccessful. Perhaps even more concerning, experts recognised that social norm work carries the risk of backlash and of paradoxically strengthening discriminatory social norms.

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Political institutions like political parties, parliaments, and local governments should be urged to lead by example through initiatives that address social norms. As they look inward, they should target their informal or unwritten rules and practices as well as formal policies.
- Local government plays a key role in helping women enter politics and in opening doors for people from marginalised groups.
- Pervasive narratives suggesting that women don’t support other women is a strongly held social norm, even amongst women, which is wielded as an excuse to deny women’s support for each other. These narratives shift focus away from the deeper structural inequalities that give men an advantage.
- Children learn to view politics through a gendered lens, but exposing them to diverse role models and reframing discussions about political leadership in classrooms, households, media, and other spaces presents an opportunity to challenge the persistent gaps in women’s political representation and leadership.
- A cross-cultural study of children’s views on gender in politics can help to better understand how different societies pass down ideas about gender roles in leadership, including those that have had prominent women leaders, and facilitate the design of culturally-tailored programmes.

## Session 5: Pathways to social norms change

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*'We don't just want to get women in. We want to change the way politics is done.'* – Dr. Sohela Nazneen, Senior Fellow, Institute of Development Studies

*'The media can be a tool for both positively influencing women's leadership inclusion, but also negatively influencing it, so promoting balanced narratives is important. The media can play a role in amplifying women's voices on key issues that inspire the next generation of women leaders because you have to see it to be it.'* – Ms. Abosede George-Ogan, Founder of the Women in Leadership Advancement Network

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### SESSION OVERVIEW:

This session began with a presentation of UN Women's research identifying pathways to social norm change, including (1) transforming narratives (i.e., developing egalitarian narratives and building consensus); (2) strengthening countervailing powers (i.e., empowering feminist organizations and building coalitions) and (3) material changes (i.e., changes in the lived reality of women and marginalized groups). Other presenters considered additional pathways for changing norms implicated in women's political participation and representation and strategies for countering backlash.

**MODERATOR: Julie Ballington, Global Policy Advisor on Women's Political Participation, UN Women**

### INTERVENTIONS BY PANELISTS:

**Ms. Paro Chaujar, Policy Advisor on Social Norms, UN Women** described how social norm change happens and reflected on the implications for the WYDE programme and for women's political participation, representation, and leadership in general. UN Women's research and consultations suggested that GEWE programmes negotiated, bargained, supported, and challenged social norms. Nevertheless, context is important, and the UN Women's Framework emphasises that what might work in one context might not work in another. Therefore, we should abandon the search for one-size-fits-all approaches. Additionally, in the different contexts described by scholar practitioners, change took a decade or more and happened when a large number of people were affected.

Three pathways of change are described in UN Women's Framework. The first pathway is transforming narratives. Ms. Chaujar highlighted how different organisations and movements which were featured in UN Women's commissioned papers were all engaged in co-developing counternarratives to challenge prevailing discriminatory narratives.

Importantly, they used existing egalitarian ideologies drawn from their context, such as the Constitution or religious texts, in order to develop the counternarratives with the participation of the communities with whom they were working. The second pathway is making tangible change in the lives of women and girls. This can include quotas, microcredit, providing job opportunities or scholarships to women, or implementing even small changes like providing buses so that girls can get to school safely. The research suggests that legal reform can operate as a sub-pathway, but the reform has an impact when accompanied by public debate. The final pathway is strengthening countervailing powers. Ms. Chaujar contended that all actors working with women's movements are aware of their crucial role, which is clearly evidenced by data from across the world. The research demonstrates that these movements were shifting social norms by: (1) collectivising or organising women using different feminist pedagogies and tools; (2) federating and democratising the movement; and (3) building coalitions or mobilising other social movements to make gender equality their agenda. All three

pathways should be engaged strategically within a single social norms programme. Citing Prof. Sonia Palmieri, Ms. Chaujar mused that ‘stars need to align for magic to happen’. Based on these findings, UN Women is reviewing its existing programmes in order to do a proof of concept of the Framework.

**Dr. Sohela Nazneen, Senior Fellow, Institute of Development Studies** has been conducting research within two five-year programmes which look at countering backlash. Although the focus is neither on social norms nor on increasing women’s participation in formal politics, they feature in the work. Given that most of the contexts in which the research has been undertaken are ‘not necessarily fully democratic’, may even be authoritarian, and are generally characterised by shrinking civic space for some actors, the research considers the implications for women’s political participation and the possible manifestations of backlash. Looking particularly at Uganda, Bangladesh, and Lebanon, Dr. Nazneen highlighted three manifestations of backlash. The first is discursive strategies used by populist parties, religious leaders, and other backlash actors. In Uganda, for example, although an affirmative action policy was established with the aim of getting women into politics, backlash actors are stigmatising and delegitimising quotas. Another strategy that emerged in the research is the effort to re-traditionalise women’s and men’s roles, thereby questioning women’s engagement in politics. A second way in which backlash manifests is in direct attacks, including violence and the threat of violence. The third manifestation is in indirect attacks, which Dr. Nazneen described as the most insidious. Without insiders, one cannot know how indirect strategies are being used. They can take the form of hollowing out or removing expansive provisions, such as domestic violence or abortion measures, or even deliberate inaction, such as when officials refuse to implement certain laws and policies or when they limit accountability.

Dr. Nazneen emphasised that social norm efforts must first consider the risks of challenging norms and be clear about who bears what kind of risks and what the costs are in a particular context. This is critical before undertaking some of the three ‘buckets’ of strategies to counter backlash which she subsequently described. The first is contestation over narratives and building counter-narratives. This is a myth-busting process in which counter-narratives draw on local traditions. The second strategy is solidarity building in which feminist movements connect with cross-sectional coalitions and share knowledge, power, access, and other resources as they resist and counter regressive norms. The final strategy is institutional measures such as legal measures, institutional designs, or hardwiring accountability to women through complaint and other mechanisms in order to change the ‘rules of the game’.

**Prof. Laila El Baradei, Professor and Chair of Public Policy and Administration Department, The American University in Cairo** presented a paper on how government organisations mandated with advancing women’s rights in Egypt, Tunisia, and Jordan, used social media in advocating for SDG 5 and for women’s rights in general between January 2015 and June 2023. The research examined the extent to which the organisations were using their Facebook pages in their advocacy and assessed the quality of this advocacy. It looked at all nine targets and 14 indicators for SDG 5. For SDG 5.5, for example, the study found that the Egyptian National Council of Women had used the key words like ‘parliament’, ‘political participation’, and ‘leadership role’ in its advocacy more than the Jordanian National Commission for Women and Tunisian Ministry of Women, Family, Childhood and Seniors. However, the most interactive post in Egypt was not relevant to women’s political participation. It offered condolences to the Head of the Council for the death of her son.

The research found that the government entities in the three countries posted most on Target 5.C (on GEWE policies and legislation), Target 5.2 (on the elimination of violence against women and girls), and Target 5.3 (on the elimination of harmful practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation). Prof. El Baradei contended that this reflected the typical prioritisation of certain issues in the Middle East, such as ‘women’s freedom, equality, and protection from violence’ which was different from ‘Western concerns like abortion rights, access to contraception, flexible work arrangements, or digital inclusion’. Consequently, the paper recommends that: (1) governments creatively use social media in order to make their posts striking (e.g., using videos, songs, influencers, singers and movie stars, or important political figures) while also ensuring that they include a call for action; (2) governments should be persistent in their advocacy efforts; and (3) future studies should involve regional comparative work and examine the extent to which the posts are correlated with improvements in SDG indicators.

**Ms. Abosede George-Ogan, Founder of the Women in Leadership Advancement Network (WILAN)** underscored the power of the media, highlighted its role in the socialisation process, and provided examples of WILAN’s efforts to transform narratives and social norms about women leaders. She contended that social norms are rooted in a socialisation process which happens through the family, peer groups, religious institutions, educational institutions, and the media. Referencing media articles centred on former Nigerian President Buhari’s claim that his wife ‘belongs in the kitchen’ and portraying a woman presidential aspirant as a ‘mother of five’, Ms. George-Ogan demonstrated how the media disadvantages women in its coverage and often focuses on their appearance and traditional roles, thereby undermining their leadership potential.



*Abosede George-Ogan, Founder of the WILAN. Photo: UN Women/Nejm Halla.*

Ms. George-Ogan suggested that the media can have a positive influence on women’s political participation by promoting balanced narratives, amplifying women’s voices on global issues, and inspiring the next generation of women leaders. Through campaigns like ‘Msrepresented’ and ‘The Leading Woman Show’, WILAN is featuring women role models, fostering public dialogue on women’s political participation, and promoting behaviour change. Through audience surveys conducted before and after each episode of the show, WILAN is trying to gauge the show’s impact. In addition to ensuring that the media adopts and enforces gender-sensitive content policies that ensure balanced representation of women in leadership, other steps that Ms. George-Ogan proposed in order to transform narratives include the adoption of gender quotas, provision of funding for female media entrepreneurs, and partnerships between

organisations and the media aimed at amplifying women's voices.

#### PLENARY DISCUSSION:

Experts discussed the three pathways to social norm change elaborated in the UN Women Framework, the tension between gendered political socialisation and agency, and women's political participation in autocratic regimes.

**Transforming narratives** – The group agreed that transforming narratives is an important pathway to social norm change. While the experts emphasised the role of the media, they also recognized the role that feminist and women's movements have played in highlighting previously hidden or invisible norms, especially when working in communities that do not rely on mainstream media.

**Making tangible change in the lives of women and girls** – Addressing women's unequal responsibility for unpaid care was recognised as a critical intervention across many contexts. Further, tangible changes may be achieved through policies and legislation to lower barriers to entry into politics.

**Strengthening countervailing powers** – The role of women's groups and movements in changing social norms was discussed as a critical element to lasting change. Examples included Paraguayan domestic workers who organised over the course of a decade to change a discriminatory law.

**Tension between gendered political socialisation and agency** – Although socialisation had been discussed in prior sessions, during this session debates surfaced about its relationship to individual agency. Some experts said that socialization theory overlooks people's ability to resist or challenge norms. However, others maintained that socialisation is fundamental to understanding how social norms are learned and ultimately passed on. What might be taken as a middle ground position was that while the concept of 'socialisation' might be useful, it has limitations because, as a social process, it is never 'complete' or 'perfect'. Although experts agreed that young children can exercise little if any agency in challenging social norms, older people can exercise far greater agency, though often with constraints. Ultimately, this key question was posed: how do people break free from the social pressures that try to define or restrict who they are?

**Women's participation in autocratic regimes** – Though cognizant of the threat democratic backsliding poses to women's political participation, experts contemplated the paradoxical role of women holding leadership roles in authoritarian regimes. On the one hand, they are often criticised for legitimising such regimes. On the other hand, they can serve as critical insiders sounding much-needed alarms on democratic erosion.

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **The three pathways to transforming social norms, described in UN Women's Framework are: transforming narratives (such as through media campaigns, women politicians' stories and feminist advocacy), making tangible change in the lives of women and girls (for instance, quotas, childcare access and funding for women-led initiatives), and strengthening countervailing powers (through feminist movements and coalitions with different sectors, like domestic workers).**
- **Women's responsibility for unpaid care work is among the biggest obstacles to women's political participation in many regions of the world, in addition to being an enduring social norm. Therefore, care-related initiatives are an important intervention for bringing about material change.**

- **Key strategies to counter backlash include myth-busting using locally grounded counternarratives, feminist and cross-movement coalition building, and institutional reform. These strategies were found to align with UN Women’s Framework.**
- **There is pressure on children to adopt narratives they see in the world on gender and leadership. Understanding how some people transcend socialisation processes is critical to social norm work, as it is challenging for an individual to overcome messaging in society from people and institutions in power.**

## Session 6: Programming and advocacy approaches to transforming social norms

*'You might see women as leaders. You might see women having agency in your family and in your community, but there is a real problem translating that to the political arena, and that's why we identified the idea that success in the very long term would be in a change in cultural, social, and political acceptance of women as political actors, both as voters and as candidates.'* – Prof. Sonia Palmieri, Australian National University

*'Often [the women parliamentarians who were interviewed] would sit and say, "Oh, I have nothing to report. Everything's fine in my Parliament." And when conversations started, they realised that there were things that were normalised, considered as normal, that were not and that we could and should label either as sexism, harassment, or violence be it economic, sexual, or otherwise.'* – Ms. Marianna Duarte Mutzenberg, IPU

### SESSION OVERVIEW:

Over the past thirty years, programmes to promote women's political participation and leadership have been implemented by a wide range of stakeholders, international and regional organisations, democracy and parliamentary assistance organisations, development partners, CSOs, and training institute, among others. These programmes have tended to focus on capacity building, institutional support, and advocacy, with few programmes focusing on social norms change. With women's participation in political life being met with increased resistance and backlash, it is essential to identify programming approaches that tackle this most difficult programme area: combating discriminatory norms. The session provided insights into technical and advocacy programming that aims to challenge and transform social norms as well as counter backlash to enhance women's political participation.

### MODERATOR: Cécile Roth, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)

#### INTERVENTIONS BY PANELISTS:

**Prof. Sonia Palmieri, Australian National University** shared her experience along with two other Australian women in designing the Australian government-funded Balance of Power (BOP) social norm programme being implemented in three countries and regionally in the Pacific since 2019. Prof. Palmieri integrated lessons from a failed programme called 'Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnerships' into the design process. This programme which involved peer-to-peer and institution-to-institution engagement between members of the Australian parliament and their peers, had been ineffective and, in some cases, even caused problems due to the perception of the privilege accorded to women. Consequently, in the BOP design process, Prof. Palmieri and her colleagues conducted extensive consultations over the course of a year and produced a report justifying a social norm change programme.

After seeing resistance to women's political leadership in Pacific contexts, they framed the development problem to be tackled by the programme as 'the disconnection between the acceptability of women as social and community leaders, and the lack of acceptance of women as political leaders and political actors in the Pacific'. Resistance was visible in the normalisation of male leadership, the role of male community elders in making electoral decisions, cultural gender norms 'effectively diffused and reinforced through community structures and relationships', challenges women faced as voters and candidates, narratives portraying legal reforms to increase women's participation as 'discriminatory', among other manifestations. The team proposed five implementation principles, namely: (1) local leadership; (2) flexibility and adaptiveness; (3) supportiveness for collective action; (4) alignment

with existing programmes; and (5) management and governance to maximise political will. Although the team developed a complex theory of change, it made clear that this was 'like a buffet' and implementers did not have to do everything. As a researcher, Prof. Palmieri indicated that research was a key strategy, but much of the research was not about evidence gathering but about finding stakeholders with whom to partner and then influencing them through a joint programme or activity. Another activity included running community fora in local languages which facilitated public contestation over social norms.

**Ms. Mildred Ngesa, Founder and Executive Director of Peace Pen Communications** drew on her experience as a journalist to elaborate on communication and advocacy as vehicles for social norm change. Using African proverbs to illustrate her points, she identified and provided some examples of eight 'vehicles' or methods that organisations and movements can use to change social norms and advance women's political participation. These are as follows: (1) well-packaged and targeted mass media campaigns which communicate essential messages, (2) educational initiatives and intentional mentorship which prepare women for leadership, (3) community organising, (4) policy and legislation, (5) influential role models, (6) social movements, (7) harnessing technological advancements like digital platforms, and (8) cross-cultural interactions exposing people to different perspectives. Two examples from the organisation Badili Africa that Ms. Ngesa shared were 'The Women Kingmakers', a docu-film that highlights women's role mobilising voters in political campaigns and 'From #Campus to #Parliament', a campaign encouraging young women to run for student council elections or get involved in student council affairs.

**Ms. Marianna Duarte Mutzenberg, IPU** described her work on gender-sensitive parliaments, which

are both a normative and programmatic framework for the IPU. IPU's engagement began with research led by Prof. Palmieri in 2011 and has continued through a series of studies on sexism, harassment, and violence against women which the IPU conducted beginning in 2016. In 2012, the IPU Assembly unanimously adopted the Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments which characterised such a parliament as 'respond[ing] to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, operations, methods, and work'. It makes gender equality the responsibility of the whole institution and of both men and women. Moreover, such parliaments are more legitimate and deliver better to their constituents. (Some of this has been integrated into a recent set of indicators for SDG 16 on democratic parliaments.) The Plan of Action has seven action areas which place the onus on creating change in Parliament not just through its written norms, but also in its structure, culture, functioning, and unwritten norms. In a 2016 resolution embedding the Plan of Action, the IPU emphasised that women's political participation was not about numbers but about enabling women to actually influence political processes. In the Kigali Declaration of 2022, members committed, among other things, to conduct two gender-sensitivity assessments and create post-assessment accountability structures. Consequently, the IPU has developed a self-assessment toolkit for a participatory process owned and led by Parliament. Assessments have recently been conducted in Mongolia (2023), and Colombia (2024), and the IPU has been tracking the impact of these and many other previous assessments. Some impacts include the designation of a gender focal point in parliament in Kenya; new or enhanced quotas in Djibouti, Mongolia, and Serbia; anti-harassment legislation or policies in Georgia and Colombia; and the adoption of provisions on violence against women in politics in Tanzania. The IPU has also taken steps to become more gender-sensitive internally.

**Prof. Paula Walker, Professor of Public Policy, University of Chile** shared narratives about women in politics in Chile over the last 20 years. She proposed that there have been two different narratives in relation to President Bachelet during her two terms in office, from 2006 to 2010 and then 2014 to 2018. The first focused on her clothes, family, and ability to make decisions. The second still involved criticism but recognised the government as having a policy of proximity. Alluding to the social revolution in Chile in 2019, Prof. Walker described the new narrative in media and politics evidenced in part by greater coverage of things like sexual harassment. Ironically, this has led to decreased support for the feminist movement, particularly among young men, and the narrative around discrimination has shifted sharply in the last seven years. In a study of violence against women participating in the Chilean constituent process, Prof. Walker found that 70 percent of the women had received hate messages during the months that they were working on the new constitution. Regardless of their political affiliation, women were singled out and Indigenous women were attacked both for their gender and indigeneity.

Although there is a strong narrative coming from the right in Latin America about needing to cancel ‘gender ideology’, Prof. Walker suggested that in Chile, the narrative is under dispute. Nevertheless, she argued that while the conservative media uses language that is easy to understand in order to highlight women’s roles in the family, maintenance of the status quo, and homogeneity, feminists are speaking about gender equality, diversity, rights, and freedom in a language that is difficult to understand. At the same time, women journalists who try to raise women’s issues are subjected to attacks. Prof. Walker urged the continued defence and advocacy for women’s voices to be heard. ‘Without gendered peace,’ she concluded, ‘there will be no true peace.’

#### PLENARY DISCUSSION:

Discussion centred on the importance of narratives and counternarratives, but the experts also discussed opportunities to build global momentum for the work; diverse leadership approaches; strengthening countervailing powers; the role of parliaments; and programme design, intention, and ethics.

**Opportunities to build global momentum** – Building momentum through key moments in the year, around participation, representation, and leadership, is critical. The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 69/Beijing +30, which included a review of women’s participation in power structures and political decision-making, was noted as a key opportunity.

**Diverse leadership approaches** – Experts contemplated the different leadership approaches of leaders like Germany’s former Chancellor, Angela Merkel, and former President Bachelet of Chile. While Bachelet used feminism in her leadership, Merkel did not place emphasis on her gender. For the experts, these differences demonstrate that there is no definitive template for what a woman leader should look like.

**Narratives and counternarratives** – The experts considered the prominence and power of the ‘gender ideology’ narrative in Chile, other parts of Latin America, and some European contexts as well. They discussed whether the rise of this narrative may be linked with a drop in support for gender equality among younger men. Experts, therefore, reflected on whether this suggests that those promoting anti-gender narratives are currently more effective at shaping public opinion – and if the feminist movement is falling behind in creating compelling counter-narratives.

However, the discussion highlighted the diversity of experiences across contexts. For instance, gender ideology does not necessarily feature in public debates in South Asia, for example. There, the identified challenge was how to discuss gender, specifically in relation to gender diverse groups.

Through discussing narratives and counternarratives, experts discussed how narratives in the media around equality, rights and freedom is more difficult to understand, complicating messages from the women's movements. However, it was noted that a majority of women politicians receive hate messages no matter their political stances.

**Strengthening countervailing powers** – Parliaments can be an entry point to change through women's caucuses, though with mixed results. For instance, in Mauritania, women's caucuses have had a significant impact, including by getting a law on gender-based violence passed and bringing attention to rural women's concerns. The IPU *Guidelines for Women's Caucuses*<sup>3</sup> and the handbook on *Gender-responsive law-making*<sup>4</sup> co-produced by the IPU and UN Women, were referenced as useful resources for parliamentarians.

Experts suggested that additional research which involves interviews with individual parliamentarians, may help enhance understanding of the impact of caucuses and other collectives.

Further, experts explored what might prompt parliamentarians to take action on closing gender gaps in political participation, representation, and leadership. They recognized the progress made through the IPU's parliamentary self-assessments and suggested that additional external assessments would help identify deeply embedded social norms.

**Programme design, intention, and ethics** - One Expert recommendation was that WYDE partners develop a methodology for the programme which centres on community conversations and encouraging accountability by the public. (SASA!<sup>5</sup> was referenced as one example of a conscientiously - designed and locally tailored approach that has made a significant impact in the work to address and end violence against women and girls.) Although community dialogues, part of UN Women's interventions, were characterised as a critical part of social norm work, experts recommend complementing these efforts with other initiatives.

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Advocacy and programmatic approaches to social norms change (centered within the UN Women framework identified pathways) include:**
  - **Transforming narratives: mass media campaigns, influential role models, cross-cultural interactions.**
  - **Tangible changes in the lives of women and girls: educational initiatives and intentional mentorship, harnessing technological advancements like digital platforms; and**
  - **Strengthening countervailing powers: community organising.**
- **Parliamentary self-assessments<sup>6</sup> reveal gaps in gender-sensitivity, identify potential institutional reforms to make parliaments more responsive to both men and women's needs, and identify mechanisms for monitoring progress.**

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<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reference/2016-07/guidelines-womens-caucuses>

4

<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/handbooks/2021-11/gender-responsive-law-making>

<sup>5</sup> <https://raisingvoices.org/women/sasa-approach/>

<sup>6</sup> Reported by the IPU

- **Violence against women in politics is pervasive, no matter the political affiliation. The public voice of women in media is subject to attacks.**
- **There is no single template for a woman leader. Women leaders use different strategies to be effective leaders; not all embrace feminism as politicians.**
- **Community dialogues are an important strategy for public accountability and buy-in. They should be conducted in compliance with ethical obligations and complemented by other activities.**
- **To more effectively counter backlash against women’s political leadership, feminist movements need to develop counternarratives that are accessible to the broader public.**
- **WYDE partners should develop a methodology for the programme which centres on community conversations to encourage accountability by the public in transforming norms.**



From left to right: Julia Meier zu Selhausen (Planning Officer Gender Equality, GIZ), Paro Chaujar (Advisor on Social Norms, UN Women), Emma Muteka (Member of Parliament Namibia), Jennifer Piscopo (Professor of Politics and Gender, Royal Holloway University of London). Photo: UN Women/Nejm Halla.

## Session 7: Measuring up: The opportunities and challenges of measuring social norm change

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*‘One assumption is that transforming egalitarian social norms will have knock on effects or, if people believe that women and men are equal in their roles and capabilities, we think other gender equality outcomes will follow. Our study calls this into doubt.’ – Prof. Jennifer Piscopo, Professor of Politics and Gender, Royal Holloway University of London*

*‘What we are trying to do with the SIGI and our masculinity framework is to really help us make the invisible visible by identifying discriminatory norms, attitudes, behaviours, and assessing their impact in order to provide actionable insights.’ – Ms. Hyeslin Park, Gender Programme Coordinator, OECD*

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### SESSION OVERVIEW:

Measuring social norm change at large is challenging, and even more so when considering the political sphere. Attitudinal and behavioural measurements are common but have shortcomings. What specific norms can be measured, and how best can this be done? This session provided an overview of current approaches to measuring social norms change and discussed their applicability to political participation. Participants were invited to reflect on the ways in which interventions, such as the WYDE | Women’s Leadership Initiative, can be measured to show social norm transformation.

**MODERATOR: Adina Wolf, Monitoring Specialist and Grants Manager, WYDE, UN Women**

### INTERVENTIONS BY PANELISTS:

**Dr. Brenda Kombo, UN Women Consultant** provided an overview of current approaches to measuring social norm change in women’s political participation after briefly reflecting on the questions and challenges raised by measurement. These challenges result from: different definitions of social norms, the long time frame over which social norm change generally happens, the impossibility of establishing causation, challenges adapting tools to particular contexts, the necessity of factoring in unintended consequences, the possibly higher cost of longitudinal and mixed methods studies, the question of who measurement serves, and the limitations of existing tools. The limitations pertain to the fact that existing tools, which are often based on the World Values Survey or Demographic and Health Surveys, tend to assess beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, opinions, behaviours, outcomes, or the existence of certain laws or policies as proxies for social norms. Using attitudes and behaviours as proxies poses problems not only due to their variability but also because of possible biases, the use of individual reporting, and ambiguity around

norms. Dr. Kombo briefly highlighted three particular tools, namely: UNDP’s Gender Social Norms Index, UN Women’s Gender Equality Attitude Survey, and the OECD’s Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI).

Social norm measurement requires balancing the implications of quantification with recognition that it is generally required as part of monitoring frameworks for donor-funded projects. Nevertheless, reflection on the knowledge politics around measurement, transparency about the assumptions and underlying theories of various measurement tools, and acknowledgment of the tools’ limitations remain significant. Dr. Kombo ended by sharing how UN Women’s proposed measurement framework followed the recommendations of a commissioned paper on measurement and of an EGM. The Framework suggests measurement of: (1) changes in narratives on gender within various social institutions; (2) changes in the ‘tangible options’ for women and girls; and (3) the strength of movements and other collective action in shifting social norms. These will

then be triangulated by looking at ‘actual changes’ in women and girls’ lives as reflected in data on prevalence, parity, and other gender equality outcomes.

**Prof. Jennifer Piscopo, Professor of Politics and Gender, Royal Holloway University of London** explained how analysis of data from a survey of Latin American legislative elites conducted by the University of Salamanca since 1994 demonstrates that surveys might not necessarily measure what we think they are measuring. Looking specifically at survey data on gender equality attitudes, Prof. Piscopo and two other colleagues suggested that the survey questions measured the following three different aspects of gender equality attitudes: (1) egalitarian attitudes; (2) recognition of gender inequality, and (3) support for state action. Their analysis indicated that although a legislator could hold all three identities (i.e., egalitarian, recogniser of gender inequality, and supporter of state action), women were more likely than men to be all three and only religiosity (measured by the frequency of their church attendance) predicted being an egalitarian. They also found that egalitarians were not necessarily recognisers and recognition was shaped by political ideology; recognisers did not necessarily support state action, and egalitarians were not likely to support state action.

Thus, the research spoke to the question of proxying and to whether egalitarian social norms have knock-on effects for gender equality. It demonstrates why, if egalitarian norms continue to be proxied in this way, they cannot serve as proxies for other gender equality attitudes. Being egalitarian neither means that someone recognises inequality nor that they support state action. Additionally, efforts to shift egalitarian norms might not have ‘knock on’ effects for other gender equality efforts. Rather, becoming egalitarian could result in a reduction in support for policy interventions to advance GEWE. Finally, political ideology shaped elites’ recognition of

inequality and support for state action more than egalitarian values. Leftists were more likely to recognise gender inequality and policy interventions aimed at addressing it.

**Ms. Hyeshin Park, Gender Programme Coordinator, OECD** described the OECD’s efforts to measure discrimination against women in social institutions through its flagship database SIGI. Although Ms. Park recognised the inherent difficulty of measuring social norms and confessed that even her team members do not share a definition of norms, she emphasised that measurement is simply intended to serve as a tool and is not a goal. Through SIGI, the OECD seeks to identify the root causes of gender inequality by identifying discriminatory norms embedded in social institutions.

SIGI is a multi-composite index which has had five different editions since 2009 and has covered 180 countries. It has four dimensions: discrimination in the family, restricted physical integrity, restricted access to productive and financial resources, and restricted civil liberties. Each dimension has four indicators, and ‘political voice’ is one of the indicators of the fourth dimension. The index looks at formal and informal laws, attitudes, and practices. These components are aggregated using vetted equations and each country received a score which allows for comparison. Nearly half of the world population thinks that men make better leaders than women. However, this varies significantly by region. At the same time, the data suggests that there has been some positive change regarding women’s political rights, but it is clear that social norm change is not a linear process. It is also important to recognise that norm change alone does not drive broader changes, and eliminating structural barriers such as legal frameworks is also important. Using an example from the OECD’s masculinities work, Ms. Park highlighted how the organisation is going beyond measuring individual beliefs and measuring perceived social expectations

by asking people whether they agree or disagree with a statement and then asking them how many randomly selected men from their community might agree with the statement.

#### PLENARY DISCUSSION:

There are challenges in measuring social norms, yet there are approaches to consider which are central to understanding when and how change occurs.

**Measurement challenges** – The experts expressed the difficulties of measuring social norm change. Experts stressed that social norms change takes time, and stakeholders must ‘consider the short-, middle-, and long-term to see the change’. Some change can be seen in the short-term. While some results in social norms change can be seen in the short term, many changes would only be seen in the long term. According to the experts, this creates some tension between identifying short-term changes due to specific interventions, and long-term sustained transformation. As such, the ideal approach proposed was to couple longitudinal studies with meeting shorter-term monitoring needs.

The experts also grappled with the measurement of social norms themselves. Some experts contended that the surveys often used to measure social norms need to be tested to ensure that they are not ambiguous and actually measure what they purport to. However, it should be noted that the UN Women framework suggests that attitude surveys should not be seen as a proxy for measuring social norms change, based on their tendency to conflate beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, expectations, and stereotypes.

The discussion observed the difference in individual perceptions and social norms, which may be

misaligned. Experts therefore noted the use of the following questions may identify a norm as opposed to an individual perception: (1) What does the *individual* think? (2) What does the individual think *others* think? (3) How does the individual *behave*? Though there are still questions open for further research including how to measure the strength or stability of a norm.

The experts additionally raised ethical considerations with regard to measurement. Ensuring a “do no harm” approach is critical. For instance, experts noted an example in an African context where a randomized control trial study led to an increase in female genital mutilation in Somalia as a result of participants who overestimated the harmful traditional practice. Therefore, underlining the concept that perceptions should not be used as proxies for measuring social norms.

**Alternative approaches** – Experts noted a triangulation approach of measuring changes in public discourse, changes in laws and policies, and changes in the lived realities of women and families, identified through the UN Women Framework. Further, this can be influenced by the strength of countervailing powers. For instance, narrative shifts in media coverage and through a range of qualitative research methods that might be used including life stories, interviews, storytelling based on UN Women’s pilot in Nepal<sup>7</sup>, can triangulate the narrative shifts. Further, experts considered alternative approaches such as measuring shifts in narratives in parliament and conducting prevalence surveys of parliamentarians.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/05/measuring-social-norm-change-through-storytelling>

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Measurement of social norms is complex and should use methodologies which do not rely on perception as proxies for social norms. Measurement should focus on: (1) changes in narratives on gender within various social institutions; (2) changes in the ‘tangible options’ for women and girls; and (3) the strength of movements and other collective action in shifting social norms. These will then be triangulated by looking at ‘actual changes’ in women and girls’ lives as reflected in data on prevalence, parity, and other gender equality outcomes.**
- **Results in transforming social norms may only be seen in the long term. However, short-term results may be measured through immediate outcomes as tangible, measurable changes which impact women and girls.**
- **Surveys should therefore move beyond perceptions and instead use a variety of triangulation methods to understand the strength of social norms, such as questions identifying their belief, what they think their community believes, how they behave and how others behave.**
- **Possible methods that the programme could use include:**
  - **Measuring narrative shifts in parliament through software like the Gender Gap App developed by Women at the Table;**
  - **Institutional audits; and**
  - **Prevalence surveys of parliamentarians.**



Photo: UN Women/Nejm Halla

## Session 8: Connecting the dots to create a framework on women's political participation

### SESSION OVERVIEW:

This session provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on key takeaways from the meeting and consider how the takeaways can serve as building blocks for a framework on social norms implicated in women's political participation and representation.

**MODERATOR:** Estela Bulku, Programme Manager, WYDE, UN Women

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

#### Pathways to social norm change

- Developing counternarratives is essential, particularly by drawing insights into how ideologically driven movements effectively use emotional and strategies to mobilize support.
- The beliefs and practices rooted in religious traditions play a role in shaping social norms around women's leadership. Rather than rejecting these norms outright, they can be critically engaged with and reinterpreted to support gender equality and women's leadership.
- Harnessing the strategies of women's movements will inform and fuel public pressure for legislative bodies to advance women's political participation, representation, and leadership.

#### Programming and Advocacy

- Partners should consider immediate actions in response to urgent global challenges while also investing in long-term efforts to create lasting change.
- While acknowledging that women heads of state and government are rare, partners should: (1) support women leaders at all levels, and (2) create inclusive spaces, especially at the local level, to raise awareness, build collective action, and ensure women have a voice in decision making at the community level.
- Locally grounded research and programming, including in local languages, should be promoted. It can provide an entry point to engaging in discussions with new actors.

#### Measurement

- Tracking shifts in discourse on women's political participation in parliament over time can help track the shifts in social norms in other contexts, such as communities and academia.
- Partners should explore and build collaborations with institutions to help measure social norms and advocate for funding to best understand the change.
- Practitioners should use surveys thoughtfully through the development of more nuanced methods which go beyond measuring attitudes and behaviours.
- Partners should explore and use existing public datasets, such as those tracking discourse in parliament, to inform this work and expand their understanding of political trends.

## Session 9: Wrap up/Closing session

### SPEAKERS:

**Dr. Brenda Kombo, UN Women Consultant**

**Ms. Julie Ballington, Global Policy Advisor on Women's Political Participation, UN Women**

**Ms. Lina Andeer, Policy Officer, Gender Equality Directorate General for International Partnerships INTPA G1 – Gender Equality, Human Rights and Democratic Governance; European Commission**

**Dr. Kombo** thanked the UN Women team, participants, and the interpreters. She reiterated a request for experts to share their key messages, indicated that papers and presentations from the meeting will be shared with permission from their authors, and invited additional feedback.

**Ms. Ballington** expressed her thanks to the participants for an engaging meeting and to the UN Women team and Dr. Kombo. As she outlined the next steps, she invited comments on the background paper which Dr. Kombo will revisit after the meeting while also drafting a meeting report

summarising the discussions. These documents will help UN Women begin a longer conversation about the Framework on women's political participation and its strategic positioning on social norm work. Ms. Ballington also thanked Ms. Andeer for the support provided by the EU and invited her to have the last word.

**Ms. Andeer** voiced her pride in partnering, as an EU focal point, with UN Women and the WYDE partners. She was inspired by the conversations and felt that they confirmed that the EU had selected the right partners.



*Photo: UN Women/Nejm Halla*

## Expert Group Meeting Participants

(in alphabetical order by surname)

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**Ms. Elise Pereira Nunes**, Deputy Mayor of Tours for Gender Equality, International Relations and City Networks

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