

Expert Group Meeting on

‘Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls’

Convened by UN-Women

Virtual Meeting

5-8 October 2020

CONCEPT NOTE

September 2020

EGM/CSW/2021/CN

I. Background and objectives

1. In accordance with its multi-year programme of work (2021-2024), the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2021 will consider as its priority theme “Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.” The Commission will consider the theme within the context of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1).
2. To take stock of current research and assist the Commission in its deliberations, UN-Women will convene a virtual expert group meeting (EGM) on the priority theme to be held virtually, via Zoom Meetings, from 5 – 8 October 2020. In its deliberations, the EGM will be informed by the Agreed Conclusions of CSW41 (1997/2) and CSW50 (2006) (B), UN General Assembly Resolution 66/130, UN General Assembly Resolution on Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: sexual harassment (A/RES/73/148), Secretary-General’s report on women and political participation (A/68/184), the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on violence against women in politics (A/73/301), and other documentation prepared specifically for the EGM.
3. The EGM will, *inter alia*:
 - Examine the state of women’s participation and decision-making in public life based on available data and consider how women participate in different forms and spaces, in both state institutions – including elected bodies (parliaments and local governments), executive positions (Heads of State and Government, cabinet ministers), and administrative positions (public sector, civil service) – and non-state structures – including in political parties, civil society organizations and social movements.
 - Consider what meaningful participation looks like for different women across formal and informal structures and the evidence showing women’s impact on transformative decision-making to promote gender equality drawing on comparative experiences;
 - Explore how to address violence against women in political and public life;
 - Explore critical barriers to women’s participation in decision-making that prevent women from realizing their civil and political rights, with special focus on women facing intersecting forms of discrimination;
 - Identify innovative policies, programmes, measures and conditions needed to attain gender balance, eliminate violence and promote inclusive representation;
 - Consider the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women’s participation, as well as how women’s leadership at all levels is contributing to decision making on COVID-19 response and recovery;
 - Develop action-oriented recommendations that address gaps and support gender-responsive implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to ensure women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.
4. The EGM builds on the priority themes of the preceding sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, taking note of the [50th session](#), which also considered equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels. It acknowledges that women participate in and influence public life and decision-making in ways that have evolved over time. It recognizes the diverse situations and experiences of women in different parts of the world, particularly the multiple and intersecting identities held by women in

public life – including age, racial or ethnic identities, sexual orientation and gender identities, those living with disabilities – as well as the inequalities they face in various aspects of public life.

II. Global policy frameworks

5. The 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ([ICCPR](#)), Article 25 provides the right of every citizen – “without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status” to: (a) take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives; (b) vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors; and (c) have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his (sic) country.¹
6. These three elements define the core of participation in public life. As explained by the [General Comment no. 25](#) on article 25 of the ICCPR, adopted by the UN Human Rights Committee, the conduct of public affairs referred to in paragraph (a) of Article 25 of ICCPR, is a “broad concept which relates to the exercise of political power, in particular the exercise of legislative, executive and administrative powers. It covers all aspects of public administration, and the formulation and implementation of policy at international, national, regional and local levels”. In addition, General Comment no. 25 also notes that “Citizens also take part in the conduct of public affairs by exerting influence through public debate and dialogue with their representatives or through their capacity to organize themselves. This participation is supported by ensuring freedom of expression, assembly and association.” It indicates that the Covenant “requires States to adopt such legislative and other measures to ensure that individuals have an effective opportunity to enjoy the rights it protects” (GC 25, para. 1), including, among others, affirmative measures to ensure that there is equal access to public service for all citizens (GC 25 para 23), and measures enabling electoral processes that are not distorted by disproportionate distribution of campaign finances and are free of violence or the threat of violence (GC 25, para 19). It also addresses the Covenant’s protection of universal rights guaranteed in articles 19, 21 and 22, including inter alia the “freedom to debate public affairs, to hold peaceful demonstrations and meetings, to criticize and oppose” (GC 25 para 25).²
7. The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ([CEDAW](#)) calls on State Parties to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life and in particular to ensure women’s equal rights, (a) to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; (b) to participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof; and to hold public office perform all public functions at all levels of government, and (c) to participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country (Article 7). It also notes that the adoption of temporary special measures (TSMs) aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women should not be considered discrimination as defined in the Convention (Article 4).
8. The [Beijing Platform for Action](#) (1995) underlines the participation and contribution of all actors of civil society, particularly women’s groups and networks and other non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, with full respect for their autonomy, in cooperation with Governments, are important to the effective implementation and follow-up of the Platform for Action. It addresses women in power and decision making in critical area of concern G. It recommends the achievement of gender-balanced composition in governmental bodies and committees, as well as in public administration and in judiciary bodies, including through setting specific targets and, if necessary, the establishment of a positive action policy. The Beijing

Platform for Action also made achieving gender balance within the UN system a priority. The 25-year review of its implementation in 2020 has brought renewed attention to the situation of women's participation in public life and gender-responsive institutions and to the need to accelerate the closing of gender gaps therein, noting that "women's representation in national and local elected deliberative bodies has been steadily increasing, but change is incremental and not sufficiently transformative" ([E/CN.6/2020/3](#)).

9. The [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) recognizes the crucial importance of gender equality as both a goal and a means of implementing the Agenda. With its interconnected and mutually dependent goals and targets the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents a comprehensive and transformative agenda for women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. It offers, *inter alia*, a framework for the realization of gender equality and women's empowerment, ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere, eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making,³ adopting and strengthening sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels, and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.⁴
10. The agreed conclusions of [CSW41](#) (1997/2) emphasized that attaining the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making was important for strengthening democracy and achieving the goals of sustainable development. In [CSW50](#) (2006) agreed conclusions (B), the Commission "emphasized that without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace could not be achieved." It furthermore "underlined the importance of the empowerment of women and their effective participation in decision-making and policymaking processes as critical tools to prevent and eliminate gender-based violence," recognizing the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls as an enabler of women's equal participation in decision-making.
11. UN General Assembly Resolution ([A/RES/66/130](#)) in 2013 called upon Member States to enhance the political participation of women and accelerate the achievement of equality between men and women. It urged all States to take action to ensure women's equal participation, including in times of political transition, by reviewing electoral systems for their impact on the participation of women; implementing appropriate measures to eliminate barriers to women's participation; encouraging political parties to remove barriers that discriminate against the participation of women; promoting awareness of the importance of women's participation in the political process; developing training to support women's participation in the electoral process; and investigating allegations of violence against women elected officials and candidates. The subsequent Report of the Secretary-General, pursuant to resolution 66/130 on women and political participation ([A/68/184](#)) provides precise data on the political participation of women at all levels and describes measures taken by Member States to ensure women's equal participation. It concludes with recommendations for further action to accelerate the achievement of equality between women and men in political participation at all levels.
12. An evolving normative framework has also demonstrated the commitment of the international community to eliminate violence against women in political and public life. The UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences presented a special, thematic report to the 73rd Session of the UN General Assembly in 2018 on violence against women in politics ([A/73/301](#)). The report notes the importance

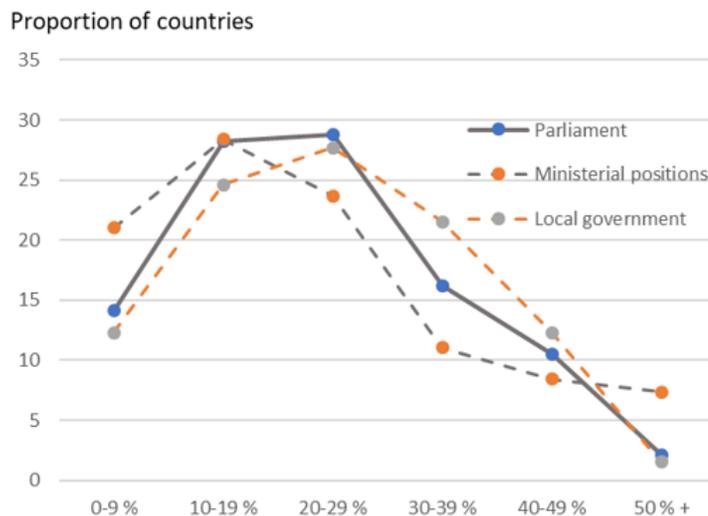
of designing, adopting and enforcing laws and policies on gender equality and prevention of gender-based violence against women consistent with international human rights law, and lays out concrete actions for State and non-state actors. Subsequently, UN General Assembly Resolution on Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls specifically called upon national legislative authorities and political parties to adopt codes of conduct and reporting mechanisms, or revise existing ones, stating zero-tolerance for violence against women ([A/RES/73/148](#)).

III. The situation of women's participation in public life, data and data gaps

13. The full and equal participation of women is globally recognized as essential for achieving gender equality and driving progress towards sustainable development. Successive reviews of these commitments, however, show that change has been incremental. Women remain marginalized from public life and decision-making in every region of the world. This trend is most starkly reflected in the low numerical presence of women in elected and appointed bodies.
14. Numerous targets have been set by the international community in key documents and resolutions for improving women's participation in public life. They include: 1979-85 CEDAW & 3rd World Conference on Women which suggested concrete measures be taken for the advancement of women; 1990: ECOSOC resolution no. 15 which recommended a target of 30% women in leadership posts by 1995 and of 50% by 2000; 1995: 4th World Conference on Women reported little progress towards 30% target; the Beijing Platform for Action stipulates the aim of "gender balance", which is subject to numerical interpretation.⁵ In 2000 the Millennium Development Goals measured progress towards the indicator of at least 30% women by 2015. The Sustainable Development Goals pledge achieving 'gender equality' by 2030, with the specific indicator to "ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life."
15. Progress on women's political participation is measured using the following standard indicators a) the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments,⁶ which has been tracked by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) for several decades, and more recently, b) the proportion of seats held by women in locally elected deliberative bodies,⁷ which is tracked by UN Women. Both indicators are used to monitor progress towards the attainment of Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.
16. The data tells us that women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making and most countries today fall short of the "gender balance" target established by the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. The global share of women in national parliaments (single/lower house) is 25%.⁸ Data from 133 countries and areas show a higher share of women in local government, at 36.3% as of 1st of January 2020.⁹ Only 13% of countries have reached gender balance (40% or more) in national parliaments, while 15% in local government. The 2020 review of the Beijing Platform for Action found that over 25 years, women's representation in national parliaments doubled from 12% in 1995 to an average of 24.3% globally in 2019, with the global median representation of women at 21%. Only 17 States (9 per cent) had achieved or surpassed the target of gender balance in their parliaments.¹⁰
17. Data on women Heads of State and Government and ministerial level positions is also regularly collected, whilst global and comparable data which measures women's participation over time in public administration, political parties, civil society and as voters is less readily available.

- *Heads of State and Government.* Regular reporting on the proportion of women Heads of State and Government shows an incremental increase, but this level of decision-making remains male-dominated. As of 1 September 2020, a woman holds position of head of state or government in only 22 countries;¹¹ this translates to 7.2% of Heads of State¹² and 6.7% Heads of Government.¹³
- *Ministerial Portfolios.* As of 1 January 2020, 21.26% of ministerial portfolios are held by women according to IPU data. Fourteen countries have 50 % or more women ministers.¹⁴ A further 16 countries have 40% or more (gender balance) women ministers.¹⁵ Nine countries have no women ministers.¹⁶
- *Local Government.* As of 1 January 2020, 36% of elected seats in local deliberative bodies are held by women, globally.¹⁷ Available data for 131 countries and areas with data on women’s representation in elected local deliberative bodies show a wide variation of women’s representation from one country to another, from 1 to 67%, with only 15% of countries reaching gender balance (40% or more). In 11% of countries women’s representation is less than 10%. Half of reporting countries with local government have less than 26% women’s representation.¹⁸

Graph 1: Women’s representation in different types of political offices



18. A widespread indicator of women’s civic engagement is their participation as voters in elections. Limited studies suggest that women may turn out to vote in roughly equal or higher numbers than men.¹⁹ However, data systematized or aggregated over time and across regions on the number and proportion of women voters is lacking.
19. The engagement of women in public demonstrations, civil society organizations and social movements is also an important indicator of political participation. Evidence suggests that across many regions, women – especially young women – are increasingly engaging in feminist politics including by voicing demands for women’s rights through civic organizing, public protest, social media and mainstream media.²⁰ Social movement membership can be fluid and there is a paucity of data about activists worldwide. These gaps make it more difficult to draw conclusions about progress or setbacks.

20. There is also a lack of data and analysis of the existence and impact of measures taken to advance women's equal participation and decision-making in public administration. While SDG indicator 16.7.1(b) covers inclusive representation in public service ("proportion of positions in public service compared to national distributions by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups"), data collection on the indicator has not yet commenced.²¹ Available data and studies suggest that women are underrepresented in public administration and structural discrimination based on gender is widespread within institutions. A growing body of empirical research points to similar challenges for women in the judiciary; while women judges contribute to improved access to justice for women, barriers remain to their participation in the justice sector, including individual, social and institutional factors.²²

IV. Critical issues for discussion during the EGM

A. Women face myriad obstacles to accessing power and decision-making across all levels

21. A key target of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 16.7) is to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.²³ Women's political underrepresentation is due to the combined effect of institutional and structural constraints, as well as cultural and attitudinal barriers that suggest women should not have a role in public life. The type of electoral system and the use of legislated quotas has been well documented as having a substantial impact on the representation of women.

22. Women's limited presence in decision-making at all levels is also frequently subject to setbacks and women remain significantly under-represented at the highest levels of political leadership.²⁴ Lack of political will to promote women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life has also hampered progress. Despite normative commitments, leaders have largely tolerated women's underrepresentation in public life. Demonstrations of political will – particularly from influential and sympathetic male leaders – can potentially 'fast track' women's inclusion in public life; this has been noticeable, for example, appointments of gender-balanced ministerial cabinets which don't require special legislation, but which can immediately increase the share of women in government. Nonetheless, when women are nominated to ministerial positions, they do not always have adequate funding or may not cover influential policy portfolios.

23. Young people face barriers to get involved in public life and decision-making, and young women face additional constraints related to gender discrimination. The IPU's 2018 report on Youth Participation in National Parliaments found that young people (under 30) made up just over 2% of the world's members of parliament, up from 1.9% in 2016. A much larger share was under 40, 15.5 %, up from 14.2 % in 2016, and 28.1 % of the world's MPs were aged under 45, up from 26 % in 2016. Across every age group, men MPs outnumbered women. The IPU research found one encouraging sign that the gender imbalance was less pronounced among younger MPs, where the male/female ratio was roughly gender balanced at 60:40.²⁵

24. The voices of women with disabilities are absent from political decision-making in most countries. Women with disabilities face many challenges and barriers which limit their access, representation and visibility at all levels of political decision-making and civic participation. Stigma and discrimination are among the biggest obstacles to women with disabilities' political participation and representation.²⁶ Findings from 19 countries in 2017 show that only 2.3% of women with disabilities were a legislator, senior official, or manager. According to the same data, in 14 out of 18 countries in Asia and the Pacific region, there was no woman parliamentarian with disabilities in national legislative bodies.²⁷ A High-Level Meeting of Women with Disabilities in Political and Public Leadership in 2019 noted that having women with disabilities in leadership roles can make a

significant difference ‘not only for others with disabilities – but for the wider political, economic and social transformations we need to deliver the 2030 Agenda and make good on our promise to leave no one behind.’²⁸

25. Information on participation of the most marginalized groups, including LGBTIQ+ persons, indigenous and afro-descendent women and migrant and rural women, is particularly scarce. The EGM will bring to light the more pressing data gaps and explore how these might be plugged by different actors.

B. Social norms and narratives do not fully consider women as equally legitimate and capable leaders and participants in public life

26. Harmful social norms and practices are among the underlying causes of women’s limited voice and political agency. Norms relating to the sexual division of labour persist in the way media describes women in public life, in discriminatory legislation²⁹ and in institutions which were not designed for people with caring responsibilities.³⁰ These norms frequently constrain women, with domestic responsibilities being the single most important deterrent to entering political life,³¹ thereby limiting the important contributions that women can make to decision-making whether through formal or informal political channels.
27. While gender stereotypes and norms are often context-specific, they overwhelmingly contribute to a reduced role for women in public life. Gender stereotypes are also predicated on overlapping identities; i.e. indigenous women may be subject to discrimination based on their heritage and gender compounding in specific discriminatory narratives. The vulnerabilities of women may be accentuated by their multiple identities arising out of the socio-political and historical dimensions of class, caste, ethnicity, religion, belief systems, age, or even political identity.³² This can create increased pressure on women candidates and leaders to defy stereotypes or speak for the different parts of their identity.
28. Electorates and media organizations perpetuate negative gender-based stereotypes that foster views of women as unqualified for political office, rather than showcase positive examples or the benefits of women’s participation. Mainstream media outlets rarely cover the political activities and public service of women in equal measure to those of men – unless those women are competing for leadership posts, but even in election campaigns, women have less media coverage than men.³³ There is some evidence to suggest, that the further people in public life deviate from the norm of white male leadership the more negative press they receive while running for office³⁴ and coverage of women candidates reinforces a prevailing gender bias against women.

C. Violence against women remains a major threat to women’s political and civil rights

29. Violence against women in political and public life is internationally recognized as a violation of women’s political rights. Violence against women in politics (VAWP) is a form of gender-based violence against women.³⁵ It is any act, or threat, of physical, sexual or psychological gender-based violence against women that prevents women from exercising and realizing their political rights and a range of human rights.³⁶ It manifests in specific, gendered ways that men do not experience, including but not limited to physical violence, sexual violence and psychological violence.³⁷ Violence can also be experienced differently by different groups of women. Violence against women in political and public life is a major deterrent to young women’s interest and participation.³⁸ Black, indigenous and minority ethnic women experience VAWP at higher levels, particularly online.³⁹

30. Violence and harassment against women in political and public life has seemingly increased as more women gain access to public office.⁴⁰ Women politicians, journalists and activists are increasingly subject to harassment, violence and cyberbullying. Global, comparative data on VAWP is lacking overall, as this problem is underexplored. Additionally, women do not usually report violence out of fear of retaliation, stigma or not being believed. In politics and elections, these fears may be exacerbated by additional reputational risks. Members of women's own political parties or families may be the perpetrators. Indicative studies suggest the problem is global and pervasive. For instance, more than 80% of the women MPs interviewed for a 2016 global study experienced psychological violence; 1 in 3 economic violence; 1 in 4 physical violence; 1 in 5 experienced sexual violence in their work in parliament.⁴¹ More than 40% of women MPs and parliamentary staff in Europe interviewed for a 2018 study experienced sexual harassment on the job, which led many to consider leaving politics.⁴² Yet only a handful of countries have specific policies combating VAWP.

D. Few institutions respond to or reflect the needs of populations they represent

31. Women in public life and at all levels of decision-making need to be supported by institutions that are gender-sensitive. Political and administrative institutions are steeped in norms, practices and policies that discriminate against women, making it difficult for women to gain access, be promoted and effect change, including policy change.⁴³ Parliaments – the majority of which do not reflect the populations they represent due to the underrepresentation of women – do not always respond to the needs and interests of both women and men in their structures, operations, methods and work.⁴⁴ Parliamentary organization and operation traditionally follow established rules, processes and norms that have historically been determined by men, which may create inherent institutional culture and traditions biased against women.⁴⁵ Parliamentary facilities, policies, rules and norms that have been adopted and the unwritten mores can all have gendered impacts.⁴⁶

32. Political parties, as the main 'gatekeepers' to political office, are the vital link for achieving equality and inclusive participation, given that they maintain firm control over the nomination of candidates for elected office.⁴⁷ Parties often favour the selection of men over women, particularly in 'winnable seats' whilst continuing to invest less in women party members and perceive women as electoral risks because of their relative inexperience to men who are more likely to be incumbents. Women also tend to have less access to moneyed networks for political finance (both public and private) and opportunities for campaign training.⁴⁸ Political leaders may tend to support candidates made in their own image, contributing to a self-perpetuating cycle of male dominance in parties.⁴⁹ Political parties also tend to fall back on informal processes when selecting and providing supporting to candidates, and these processes -typically informed by the rules of patronage and clientelism- treat women as outsiders reinforcing existing barriers.⁵⁰ They are also slow to introducing protocols and mechanisms to address violence against women in politics.

33. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are having far-reaching impacts on political processes, institutions and policies.

- Women are at the "helm of institutions carrying out effective and inclusive COVID-19 responses, from the highest levels of decision-making to frontline service delivery."⁵¹ Several women leaders have been recognized for excelling in the response, providing powerful examples of how women's leadership and participation can bring effective, inclusive and fair policies, plans and budgets to address the pandemic.
- At the same time, while women comprise more than 70% of frontline workers in the crisis and shoulder more than three times the amount of unpaid care work as men, they are systematically excluded from

decision-making institutions responding to the pandemic.⁵² Strained health and care systems, and widening socio-economic divides are creating deep political and social insecurity, with women and girls disproportionately affected. Shelter in place measures have restricted freedom of movement and suspended regular political processes; for example, out of 66 countries surveyed by the IPU, 20% had suspended their parliaments as of June 2020⁵³ and by the end of May, 64 countries and territories around the world had postponed or cancelled national and subnational elections.⁵⁴

34. Times of crisis can lead to decisions being taken without the full consideration of women's rights, experiences and perspectives, especially as these are often omitted in decision-making in 'normal' times. At the same time, opportunities for a 'new' normal arise out of crises. Institutions and their leaders have an opportunity presented by crises to reflect on the gender sensitivity of their responses, and to make changes where appropriate. The gender sensitive procedural and budgetary responses of institutions today can translate to institutional changes that last into tomorrow and move the world closer to gender equality.⁵⁵

E. Women's participation and leadership is critical for achieving transformational change

35. Changing the narrative about women's participation in decision-making requires examining the evidence of women's contributions to public life which suggests increased quality of policy outcomes for all, including transformative change for women and the advancement of gender equality. Similarly, women in social movements and in political leadership have demonstrated an unprecedented ability to achieve transformative change, whether through mobilizing for social justice or responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.
36. Women consistently show political leadership by working across party lines through parliamentary women's caucuses – even in the most politically combative environments – and by championing issues of gender equality such as the elimination of gender-based violence, parental leave and childcare, pensions, gender-equality laws, and electoral reform.⁵⁶ Parliaments with greater numbers of women have been found to perform oversight functions more effectively, and public perceptions of parliament may be more positive when more women are represented.⁵⁷ At the local level, women's inclusion in decision-making bodies has been shown to make a difference, particularly in investments in women's practical needs.⁵⁸
37. Women in politics serve as important role models for other women. As more women take on roles and careers in politics, public service and civic movements, younger generations – both men and women – are more understanding and accepting that it is a viable, legitimate career path for women. Women's leadership has also been found to raise girls' and young women's educational attainment and career aspirations.⁵⁹
38. The role of men in achieving gender equality and encouraging women's participation in public life and decision-making is critical in helping to achieve transformational change for gender equality. Men can help challenge patriarchal beliefs, practices, institutions and structures that drive inequality between men and women. When influential men political leaders such as traditional leaders, political party leaders, or heads of state and government not only openly support gender equality and women's leadership within feminist circles, but also use and share their power and privilege to promote gender equality among other men, they help shift dominant norms and ideas about gender and gender roles.

F. Women are challenging tradition by organizing outside formal structures

39. Ensuring women's participation in public life takes on particular urgency at a time of slow and inadequate progress worldwide. Shrinking civic space and increasing attacks on women in political and public life are

undermining institutions' accountability to meet gender equality commitments.⁶⁰ In several states, women's rights and feminist groups, have come under increasing pressure in recent years. This has forced a transformation of women's modes of organizing in public life, a "reconfiguration of institutional and civic space"⁶¹ and a successful appropriation of "technological change, notably the global spread of the internet [which] has had a major impact on politics and has enabled new forms of activism".⁶² Online activism is increasingly considered a legitimate means of participation in public life and there is evidence that participation in online fora does also translate or encourage people to take part in national elections.⁶³

40. Sustained exclusion from formal decision-making processes and shrinking civic space has contributed to young women consciously rejecting formal structures.⁶⁴ Young women are instead creating and claiming their own spaces, often but not exclusively through digital media. Young women's organizing both online and offline happens in characteristically temporal, horizontal and informal ways.⁶⁵ In feminist movements specifically, leadership models are primarily participatory. They typically take an intersectional rather than single issue approach. They tend to be unregistered, working collaboratively and connecting across networks in an organic way,⁶⁶ particularly when forced underground by restrictions on freedom of assembly and expression.
41. Social media platforms have become a space for political organizing that have no formal requirements for participation.⁶⁷ This has been important for women who are not part of the political and economic elite and for whom the barriers to formal political engagement are prohibitive. Social media has enabled young women, in particular, to participate on their terms, shaping narratives on issues that matter to them and mobilizing others in their efforts. Notable cases such as the #MeToo movement rallied women globally through social media and have had a tangible impact on challenging norms, behaviors and institutional practices.⁶⁸ Yet women also tend to have less access to social media and the internet than men in many countries. Globally, approximately 327 million fewer women than men can access mobile internet, and an increase in the gender internet usage gap in Least Developed Countries has driven disparities in usage between developed and developing countries.⁶⁹
42. At the same time online gender-based abuse and sexual harassment has become increasingly common.⁷⁰ Under its [General Recommendation No. 35](#) (2017), the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended that States encourage the private sector, including businesses and transnational corporations, to take all appropriate measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination, including violence against women, and to take responsibility for any forms of violence. Yet social media companies have been slow responding to growing misogynistic content and to hate groups explicitly targeting women, minorities and elected women leaders. Emerging research links misogynistic content to reinforcing harmful social norms about women leaders, and to the perpetuation of violence against them in real life.⁷¹ Some studies show that women leaders from ethnic minorities are disproportionately targeted on social media.

V. Profile of participants

43. The EGM will be attended by approximately 30 experts, appointed by the Under Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-Women. In selecting the experts, the criteria of geographical balance and research expertise will be taken into consideration. Experts will include academics and practitioners from relevant fields, as well as representatives from networks and associations, in accordance with the objectives identified above.
44. Observers from the United Nations System, inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and academia are welcome to attend the EGM upon invitation of or on prior approval by UN Women.

45. Experts will present and discuss their work at the meeting. They are expected to participate actively in plenary and any working group discussions and that they contribute to the formulation of recommendations for the report of the meeting.

VI. Documentation

46. The documentation for the meeting will include:

- Draft background papers commissioned by UN-Women as follows:

a. **“The State of Women’s Participation and Decision-Making in Public Life”**, by *Pippa Norris*.

This background paper provides the overarching picture of the state of women’s participation and decision-making in public life. The paper summarizes and captures relevant global and legal policy frameworks and current data, but also provides comparative analysis of the conceptual and empirical interconnections between the three focus areas of the priority theme: participation in public life, decision-making, and eliminating violence against women in public life.

b. **“How Women Participate in Political and Public Life and Space”**, by *Shireen Hassim and Laurel Weldon*.

This background paper articulates and explores the different ways and forms women participate in public life outside of formal political or executive spaces. It examines questions such as what is “public life” versus “public affairs,” the “public sphere,” and “public policy” and the degree to which women are taking part in civil society and/or feminist movements as participants in public life. It also examines concepts of “participation and decision making” how women may influence policymaking streams outside state institutions.

- Expert papers: Short written contributions prepared by experts on specific issues in line with their expertise.

VII. Organization

47. The EGM will be convened virtually by UN-Women on 5 – 8 October 2020. Connection details will be shared before the event.

48. The EGM will be conducted in English. Language interpretation will be provided in Arabic, French and Spanish. Most documentation will be in English, with translations of key meeting documents and background papers made available.

49. Social distancing requirements brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic require this EGM to meet virtually over four days with 2 1.5-hour sessions per day in plenary plus working groups. Breaks will be included. Experts will contribute questions and feedback on a collaboration document (e.g. Google Document) and using the chat function. Moderators in plenary will synthesize the feedback and questions shared by experts to create a framework for working group discussions. Experts will work in smaller breakout groups to discuss specific issues/themes and draft concrete policy and programme recommendations for various stakeholders.

50. Two co-chairs will be appointed by the experts at the beginning of the EGM to oversee the meeting and the preparation of the EGM report.

VIII. Expected outcome

51. The outcome of the EGM will be a report, containing a summary of the discussion and recommendations directed at Member States and other stakeholders. The report will be made available at the sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and on the website of UN-Women.

¹ ICCPR (1966), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>

² UN Human Rights Committee, 1966. General Comment No. 25: The right to participate in public affairs, voting rights and the right of equal access to public service. Para. 5. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2fC%2f21%2fRev.1%2fAdd.7&Lang=en

³ Sustainable Development Goal Target 5.5 measured by Indicator 5.5.1 (proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments).

⁴ Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 16.

⁵ For example, the Council of Europe Recommendation on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making (2003) defined gender balance as meaning “that the representation of either women or men in any decision-making body in political or public life should not fall below 40 per cent,” which set a “quantitative parity threshold, with 40 per cent women and 40 per cent men, the remaining 20 per cent being open to either of the sexes in a flexible way” to help achieve equal representation.

⁶ SDG Target 5.5.1a

⁷ SDG Target 5.5.1b

⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union & UN Women, *Map on Women in Politics: 2020*.

⁹ Based on data for 133 countries and areas compiled by UN Women.

¹⁰ <https://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2020/3>

¹¹ Data compiled by UN Women based on information provided by Permanent Missions to the United Nations. Only elected Heads of State considered.

¹² Bolivia (HS/HG), Estonia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Greece, Nepal, San Marino, Singapore, Slovakia, Switzerland (HS/HG), and Trinidad & Tobago.

¹³ Bangladesh, Barbados, Belgium, Bolivia (HS/HG), Denmark, Finland, Gabon, Germany, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland (HS/HG)

¹⁴ Spain (66.7%), Finland (61.1%), Nicaragua (58.8%), Colombia (57.9%), Austria (57.1%), Peru (55%), Sweden (54.5%), Rwanda (53.6%), Albania (53.3%), France (52.9%), Andorra (50%), Canada (50.0%), Costa Rica (51.9%), Guinea-Bissau (50%).

¹⁵ South Africa, Ethiopia, El Salvador, Georgia, Seychelles, Netherlands, Mozambique, Norway, Switzerland, Portugal, Grenada, Angola, Germany, Guyana, Iceland, Liechtenstein.

¹⁶ Brunei Darussalam, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Viet Nam.

¹⁷ SDG database 2019 <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database>

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/voter-turnout-trends-around-the-world.pdf>

²⁰ <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/64/egm/molyneux%20background%20papersecond%20draftbp2.pdf?la=en&vs=1228>

²¹ UNDP has worked on data collection through its Gender Equality in Public Administration (GEPA) project, but data collection on 16.7.1 is yet to commence.

²² <https://www.idlo.int/publications/women-delivering-justice-contributions-barriers-pathways%2foverlay-context=women-judges-break-down-barriers-womens-access-justice>

²³ SDG Target 16.7

²⁴ UN Women Thematic Strategic Plan Output 4 Theory of Change: More women of all ages fully participate, lead and engage in political institutions and processes

<https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/executive%20board/2017/second%20regular%20session%202017/the-ories-of-change-for-un-womens-thematic-priorities-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5133>

²⁵ <https://www.ipu.org/our-impact/youth-empowerment/data-youth-participation>

²⁶ https://www.iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/en_consolidated_reply_e-discussion_on_pp_of_women_with_disabilities_0_1.pdf

²⁷ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2018). “Realization of the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities.” Page 139.

²⁸ <https://www.un.org/pga/73/2019/06/12/high-level-meeting-of-women-with-disabilities-in-political-and-public-leadership-towards-beijing25/>

²⁹ World Bank Group, 2014, *Voice and Agency: Empowering women and girls for shared prosperity*.

³⁰ Study from Canada Dersnah, M.A. (2013) Women in Political and Public Life. Global Report for the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and practice

³¹ IPU, 2008, Equality in Politics: A Survey of Men and Women in Parliaments

³² Study from Fiji. Chatter, Priya. (2015). Intersectional Discrimination and Women’s Political Participation in Fiji. State Society and Governance in Melanesia In Brief Series.

³³ UN Women and International IDEA (2012) <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/ojos-que-a%C3%BAAn-no-ven.pdf>

³⁴ L. Trimble, 2015. Politicizing Bodies: Hegemonic Masculinity, Heteronormativity, and Racism in News Representations of Canadian Political Party Leadership Candidates

³⁵ Violence against women in politics (VAWP) is the term largely used by the UN System; however, other terms and abbreviations are sometimes used in different contexts, such as: Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWiP); Political Violence and Harassment, which is often used in parts of Latin America; or Electoral Sexual Gender-Based Violence (ESGBV), which is often used in Kenya.

³⁶ Based on UN Women’s definition in UN Women and UNDP, 2017; see also the Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on violence against women in politics to the UN General Assembly (UN, 2018, A/73/301).

³⁷ UN Women and UNDP, 2017.

³⁸ https://www.iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/consolidated_reply_youth_political_participation_en_0.pdf

³⁹ A report by Amnesty International highlighted the experience of Diane Abbott, a longstanding front bench opposition MP, who is from a minority ethnic background, and in the run up to the 2017 UK General Election, received on her own nearly half of all online abuse towards women leaders <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/online-violence-women-mps>.

⁴⁰ <https://undocs.org/en/A/73/301>

⁴¹ IPU, 2016. “Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians”.

⁴² IPU and Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2018. “Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe”.

⁴³ IPU, 2008, Equality in Politics: A Survey of Men and Women in Parliaments

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Colleen Lowe Morna (ed.), 2004. p. 99.

⁴⁷ UNDP and NDI, 2012. *Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties*, p. 19. <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/empower-women-political-parties.html>

⁴⁸ Julie Ballington and Muriel Kahane, 2005, "Women in Politics: Financing for Gender Equality," in International IDEA, *Funding of Political Parties and Election Campaigns*. 49 Study from Malawi. Chr.Michelsen Institute (CMI); CMI Brief Vol.15 No.12; Author(s): Happy Mickson Kayuni, Kondwani Farai Chikadza

⁵⁰ Bjarnegård, E., Kenny, M. (2016) Comparing Candidate Selection: A Feminist Institutional Approach. *Government and Opposition*, 51(3): 370-392
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/gov.2016.4>

⁵¹ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/06/policy-brief-covid-19-and-womens-leadership>

⁵² <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women>

⁵³ <https://www.ipu.org/country-compilation-parliamentary-responses-pandemic>

⁵⁴ <https://www.idea.int/news-media/multimedia-reports/global-overview-covid-19-impact-elections>

⁵⁵ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/06/a-primer-for-parliamentary-action-gender-sensitive-responses-to-covid-19>

⁵⁶ Ibid, IPU, 2008

⁵⁷ Kinyondo, Abel Alfred, Riccardo Pelizzo, and Aminu Umar, "A functionalist theory of oversight." *African Politics & Policy* 1, no. 5 (2015): 1-25; Pelizzo, Riccardo, and Frederick Stapenhurst, "Parliamentary oversight tools: A comparative analysis." London. Routledge, 2012.

⁵⁸ Research on *panchayats* (local councils) in India uncovered that the number of drinking water projects in areas with women-led councils was 62% higher than in those with men-led councils. R. Chattopadhyay and E. Duflo, 2004, "Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from a Randomized Policy Experiment in India," *Econometrica* 72(5), pp. 1409–1443, as cited in UN Women, Facts and Figures: Leadership and Political Participation. In Norway, a direct relationship was found between the presence of women in municipal councils and the availability of childcare. K. A. Bratton and L. P. Ray, 2002, "Descriptive Representation: Policy Outcomes and Municipal Day-Care Coverage in Norway," *American Journal of Political Science*, 46(2), pp. 428–437, as cited in UN Women, Facts and Figures: Leadership and Political Participation.

⁵⁹ Beaman Lori, Duflo Esther, Pandi Rohini, Topalora Petia. 2012. "Female Leadership Raises Aspirations and Educational Attainment for Girls: A Policy Experiment in India." *Science* 335: 582–86.

⁶⁰ SG Report on Beijing+25

⁶¹ <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/discussion-paper-democratic-backsliding-and-the-backlash-against-womens-rights-en.pdf?la=en&vs=3604>

⁶² <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/64/egm/molyneux%20background%20papersecond%20draftbp2.pdf?la=en&vs=1228>

⁶³ Tufts, 2018, *So Much for "Slacktivism": Youth Translate Online Engagement to Offline Political Action*

⁶⁴ F. Anumo, and V. Bah, 2017 "The revolution will not be NGO-ised": four lessons from African feminist organising. *OpenDemocracy*

⁶⁵ D. L. O'Malley and J. Johnson, 2018 "A young feminist new order: an exploration of why young feminists organise the way they do," *Gender & Development*, 26(3), pp. 533-550

⁶⁶ FRIDA, The Young Feminist Fund & Association for Women's Rights in Development's Young Feminist Activism Program, 2017, *Brave, Creative, Resilient: The State of Young Feminist Organising*.

⁶⁷ L. Bode, 2013 "A New Space for Political Behavior: Political Social Networking and its Democratic Consequences" *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*

⁶⁸ B. Prager, #MeToo In China: Social-Media Driven Activism in The Face of Government Censorship, *Harvard Journal of Law and Gender*, 2018

⁶⁹ <http://www.oecd.org/internet/bridging-the-digital-gender-divide.pdf>

⁷⁰ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/184/58/PDF/G1818458.pdf?OpenElement>

⁷¹ The Jo Cox Committee, *The Pyramid of Hate in Italy*, 2017