



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.



150th IPU Assembly

Tashkent, Uzbekistan (5–9 April 2025)

Workshop

Beliefs and social norms: What impact on women's health?

Organized jointly by the IPU, the World Health Organization, and the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health

Sunday, 6 April 2025, 14:00–15:30

Concept note

Background

Social norms and beliefs play a crucial role in shaping societal structures and values, influencing behaviours, and reproducing power dynamics that affect various aspects of life, including health. These norms are embedded in institutions such as the legal and judicial system, educational, religious and cultural institutions, and the media. Gender norms, as a subset of social norms, vary across and within societies and have tangible effects on individuals and communities, shaping perceptions and expectations about gender roles.

Women's health outcomes are deeply affected by social norms that dictate what behaviours and health practices are considered acceptable. In many cases, these norms can be harmful, leading to adverse health consequences and violations of rights. Female genital mutilation, child marriage and sexual violence are examples of harmful practices linked to ingrained social norms that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and inequality. Stigma, discrimination, and misinformation and disinformation can deter individuals from seeking health information and services. Gender norms also interact with other socio-economic factors, compounding vulnerabilities and creating intersecting forms of discrimination that disproportionately impact marginalized groups.

Parliamentarians have a unique and influential role in addressing these issues. They are confronted with social norms in multiple ways, including addressing laws that reinforce prevailing norms and sometimes perpetuate harmful gender biases, challenging harmful norms through legislation by prohibiting discriminatory and harmful practices and promoting gender equality, ensuring the effective implementation of laws that face resistance when they conflict with entrenched social norms, and navigating stigma and taboos by engaging on sensitive health- and gender-related issues, necessitating strategies to foster open and constructive discussions.

The workshop will provide a platform for parliamentarians to reflect on their role in addressing the intersection of social norms, gender equality and health, and to identify concrete actions that support better health outcomes for women.

The workshop takes place on the eve of World Health Day 2025, a global campaign which this year calls for increased attention on women's longer-term health and well-being, in a context marked by pushback against women's rights, including sexual and reproductive rights, around the world.

E

#IPU150

Objectives and guiding questions

The objectives of the workshop are as follows:

- To discuss the impact of social norms on women's health, with a particular focus on gender norms.
- To explore the role of parliamentarians in shaping and implementing laws and policies that challenge harmful norms, counter misinformation and disinformation, and promote gender equality in health.
- To share good practices and strategies for engaging with communities and stakeholders on sensitive and taboo issues.

The following questions will guide the discussion:

- How do social norms, particularly gender norms, shape health behaviours and impact access to healthcare for women?
- What role do parliamentarians play in reinforcing, challenging or transforming social norms?
- What strategies have been successful in addressing harmful gender norms in health? How can intersectoral collaboration (e.g. between parliament, government, religious authorities, communities and civil society) be leveraged?

Practical arrangements

This 90-minute session is open to all delegates at the 150th IPU Assembly.

Interpretation will be provided in English, French, Spanish and Arabic.