Rapid evidence assessment: How international rules and norms translate into action in low- and middle-income countries and lead to more open societies and stronger human rights outcomes

Final report

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Acronyms

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFID	Department for International Development
EU	European Union
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
LGBT+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and the '+' symbol is used to ensure it is inclusive of all sexual and gender identities and expressions, such as people who identify as non-binary, or queer.
LICs	Low-Income Countries
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MICs	Middle-Income Countries
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
REA	Rapid Evidence Assessment
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SOGI	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
WINGOS	Women's International NGOs
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

1. Executive summary

1.1. Objectives and scope of this review

This Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) aims: (a) to describe the *volume and characteristics of the evidence available* about several specific topics, and (b) to *summarise and critically appraise what that evidence indicates* about those topics.

The overarching research question guiding this analysis was: **How do international rules and norms translate into action in low-income countries (LICs) and middle-income countries (MICs) and lead to more open societies and stronger human rights outcomes?** Three sub-questions were also considered:

1. What are the pathways through which international norms and rules can have an impact on specific countries, and which factors make this more likely?
2. What conditions need to exist before this impact is possible?
3. What role do elite actors play in this process, and how can they be influenced?

The study focused on three policy themes: LGBT+ rights, preventing financial crime, and gender equality. These three themes serve, to some extent, as proxy indicators that could aid in considering the implications of rules and norms for broader freedom and democracy outcomes.

The study examined each theme in relation to three pathways that contribute to the spread and internalisation of norms through the *norm lifecycle*:[1]

- **norm carriers**: states, organisations, and individuals that adopt, embody, and share norms;
- **intermediate outcomes**: observable milestones such as commitments, programmes, and other changes that demonstrate progress in the adoption and internalisation of norms; and
- **enforcement and incentive mechanisms**: formal or informal mechanisms used to apply pressure to others to adopt norms.

To identify relevant evidence, the research team searched a range of academic databases and other websites for research publications related to the diffusion of international norms and rules. This report synthesises findings from 173 quantitative and qualitative studies published between 2000 and 2023, with a focus on LICs and MICs.

1.2. Size of the evidence base

The volume of evidence on a subject does not necessarily indicate the importance of the issue for any particular purpose, but may be influenced by factors such as research funding priorities, feasibility of research on the topic, and methodological challenges.

There is a large body of evidence examining **norm carriers** (172 papers) across the three themes examined in this review, most of which relates to the role played by international organisations. National and local governments, civil society, other activists, and households and communities are also commonly studied in relation to gender equality norms. The private sector (specifically the banking sector) is studied almost exclusively in relation to financial crime (particularly money laundering). There is very little evidence available about other norm carriers.

There is a large body of evidence (166 papers) about **intermediate outcomes** achieved in implementing international norms, but the availability of evidence varies significantly across the three

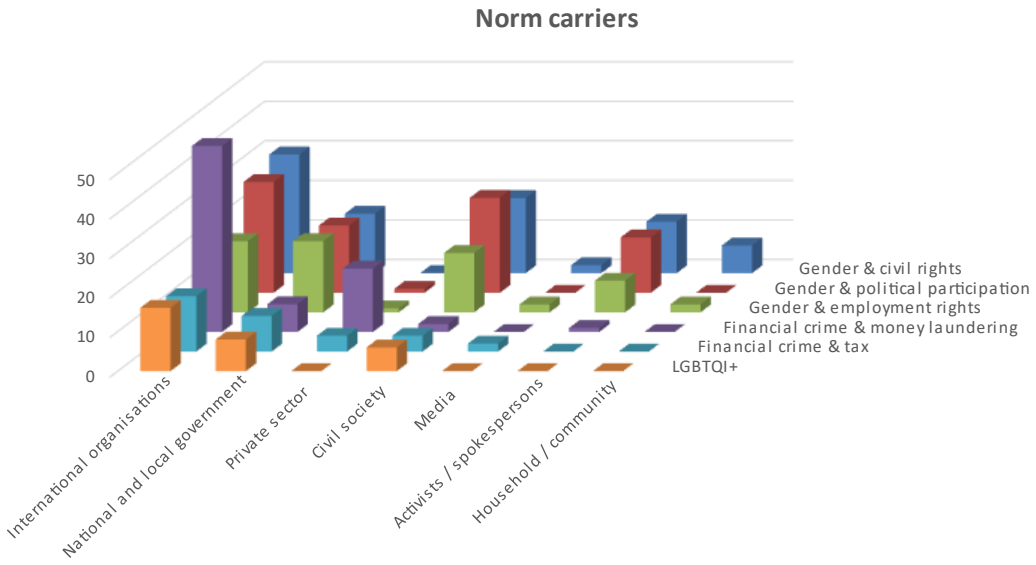
[1] The norm life cycle denotes three linked stages (emergence, cascade, and internalisation) that accompany the diffusion of norms (for a detailed discussion, see Finnemore & Sikkink (1998), p. 896-901 and section 2.3).

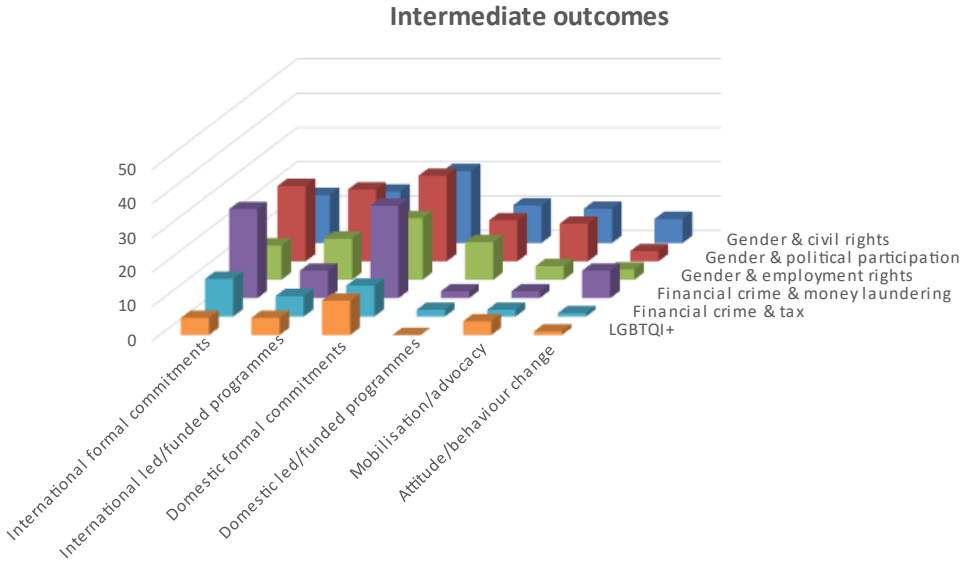
themes studied. Formal or official commitments and programmes are generally well studied, and a large quantity of evidence is available about international formal commitments, international programmes, and domestic formal commitments relating to the themes of gender equality and preventing financial crime, but not LGBT+ rights. There is also a significant body of evidence about all types of outcomes in relation to gender equality. Only very limited evidence is available about outcomes for domestic programmes, mobilisation and advocacy, and attitude and behaviour change in relation to financial crime and LGBT+ rights.

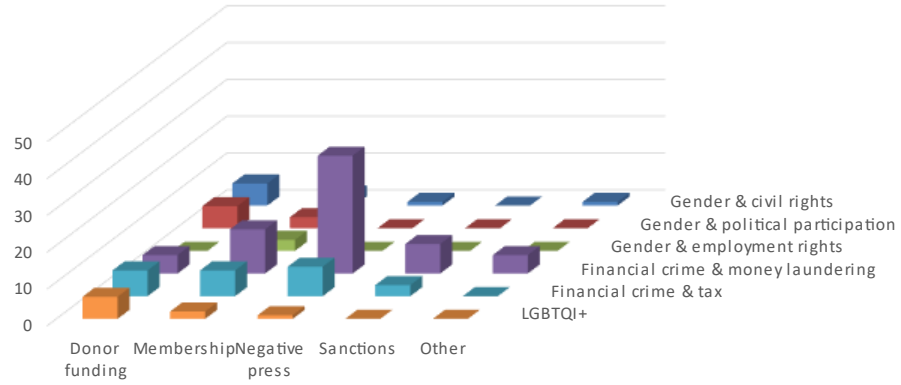
There is a significant amount of evidence (79 papers) available about **enforcement and incentive mechanisms** in relation to preventing financial crime, most notably about the role of negative publicity in the form of official 'naming and shaming' in enforcing norms for preventing money laundering. There is very little evidence published about enforcement and incentive mechanisms in relation to norms around the other two main themes studied in this review, LGBT+ rights and gender equality.

The distribution of available evidence across the themes and pathways studied in this review is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Number of studies identified for each pathway and theme


Norm carriers
50
40
30
20
10
0
International organisations
National and local government
Private sector
Civil society
Media
Activists / spokespersons
Household / community
Gender & civil rights
Gender & political participation
Gender & employment rights
Financial crime & money laundering
Financial crime & tax
LGBTQI+


Intermediate outcomes
50
40
30
20
10
0
International formal commitments
International led/funded programmes
Domestic formal commitments
Domestic led/funded programmes
Mobilisation/advocacy
Attitude/behaviour change
Gender & civil rights
Gender & political participation
Gender & employment rights
Financial crime & money laundering
Financial crime & tax
LGBTQI+


Enforcement and incentive mechanisms
50
40
30
20
10
0
Donor funding
Membership
Negative press
Sanctions
Other
Gender & civil rights
Gender & political participation
Gender & employment rights
Financial crime & money laundering
Financial crime & tax
LGBTQI+

1.3. Main findings

Based on the literature identified in this review, five principal conclusions can be drawn:

1. **Norms are diffused to and applied in LICs and MICs in complex, multifaceted, non-linear, and context-specific processes**. Formal policy commitments do not always lead to direct change on the ground; instead, there is a need for combined approaches, working through diverse norm carriers and using a range of diffusion and enforcement mechanisms. An approach that is effective in one country or in relation to a particular norm, might be completely ineffective in a different context. A multi-pronged approach is far more likely to achieve norm internalisation than single-route, single-carrier approaches. This point is especially relevant to the REA sub-questions on which norm transmission pathways can be impactful, and what conditions are needed, and which factors will make this more likely; the answer emerging from the REA is that there is no single definitive pathway, or set of factors or conditions. Norm diffusion, adoption and internalisation are complex and a range of approaches could work.

2. **Norm carriers rarely work alone, but are more likely to be effective when working in collaborative networks, especially with national level actors**. International actors have a significant role to play in framing and promoting norms, and in convening discussions, but they must inevitably cooperate with and support a range of national actors to achieve impacts within countries. Positive impacts have been seen when international organisations collaborate with and support local, national, or regional actors. In the case of LGBT+ rights and gender equality, there is consensus that local actors should be 'in the driving seat' rather than being seen to be implementers of an externally-imposed agenda.

3. **Internalising norms is a difficult and contested process; formal commitments are not sufficient by themselves to achieve action 'on the ground', and internalising norms often requires broad social change**. Norm adoption is complex, contested, context-specific, and in some cases depends on technical capacity. The process of transmitting national legislation and commitments to the local level can be mediated (and distorted) by local social and cultural factors, lack of capacity, and other constraints. This suggests that formal commitments, while often a significant achievement, should not be seen as evidence of norm adoption, but rather as a stepping stone towards it. There is good evidence that norms around gender equality are being internalised (as demonstrated not only by the adoption of international formal commitments, but also by the implementation of gender quotas and increased representation of women in decision-making bodies), but international norms relating to financial crime and LGBT+ rights appear to have been more weakly adopted.

4. **Adopting national legislation guaranteeing rights or making formal international commitments does not necessarily equate to positive societal outcomes**; for instance, tangible changes in behaviour and attitudes on the ground. As seen with gender equality norms, the process of transmitting national legislation/commitments to the local level can be mediated (and/or distorted) by complex factors including local social and cultural attitudes. In other cases, as with preventing financial crime, lack of capacity or other constraints can undermine implementation. Internalising norms is a complex social process, hence formal commitments are usually a stepping stone towards internalising or adopting norms at the local level. while often a significant achievement, should not be seen by themselves as evidence of norm adoption, but rather as a stepping stone towards it. Donors should consider what further support could be provided to translate policy commitments into change on the ground.

5. **Internalising norms is a complex social process, and enforcement and incentive mechanisms may not be able to contribute strongly to internalising norms about socially and culturally sensitive issues**. However, it is also clear (albeit with a limited quantity of evidence) that these mechanisms have contributed to internalising some types of norms. In gender equality and preventing financial crime, donor funding and 'naming and shaming' have been shown to be effective. However, enforcement and incentive mechanisms do not appear to have been effective in promoting norms for LGBT+ rights.

Additional and more detailed findings are presented in the body of this report.

2. Introduction

2.1 Research questions and thematic scope

This REA was commissioned by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) to explore the ways in which international rules and norms translate into action in LICs and MICs and lead to more open societies with stronger human rights outcomes.[2]

A Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) is 'a type of evidence review that aims to provide an informed conclusion on the volume and characteristics of an evidence base, a synthesis of what that evidence indicates and a critical appraisal of that evidence' (Collins et al., 2015, p. xi). This report identifies the available evidence about how selected international norms are promoted and translated into action in low- and middle-income countries, discusses the quantity of evidence available, and presents the principal findings that emerge from the literature. It makes a distinction between the *volume of evidence* on a subject (which does not necessarily indicate the importance of the issue for any particular purpose, but may be influenced by factors such as research funding priorities, feasibility of research on the topic, and methodological challenges) and *what the evidence says* about the subject.

The overarching question guiding this REA is: '**How do international rules and norms translate into action in low- and middle-income countries and lead to more open societies and stronger human rights outcomes?**'

Subordinate to this are three sub-questions which are explored in the case studies:

1. What are the pathways through which international norms and rules can influence specific countries, and which factors make this more likely?
2. What conditions need to exist need before this impact is possible?
3. What role do elite actors play in this process, and how can they be influenced?

[2] Shaping the open international order is one of the four pillars of the strategic framework set out in Her Majesty's Government's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy (HM Government, 2021). The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) leads and supports international efforts to shape rules and norms related to open societies and human rights, securing agreements and commitments that promote freedom and democracy. FCDO's work in this area is grounded in an assumption that establishing international rules and norms will lead to more open societies and improved human rights outcomes throughout the world (see for example HM Government, 2021a).

Three themes[3] were selected in dialogue with FCDO as the focus of this REA, providing insight into norms at different stages of their lifecycles:

- **LGBT+ rights:**[4] protection against violence or discrimination for LGBT+ persons; protection against violence or discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI); protection against violence or discrimination for men who have sex with men; establishment and enforcement of legislation banning transphobia; and establishment and enforcement of legislation banning homophobia.
- **Preventing financial crime**: there should be a 'whole of government' approach to fighting tax/financial crime; there should be global standards for preventing money laundering.
- **Gender equality**: there should be no discrimination against individuals in regard to civil rights and legal rights based on gender; there should be no discrimination against individuals in regard to political participation based on gender; there should be no discrimination against individuals in the workplace based on gender.

These three themes serve, to some extent, as proxy indicators that could aid in considering the implications of rules and norms for broader freedom and democracy outcomes. The LGBT+ rights theme was particularly selected to provide an insight into how a right can (or cannot as the case may sometimes be) become a norm through a process of social and legal recognition and acceptance.

2.2 Rights, norms, and rules

Rights, norms, and rules shape behaviours and interactions at various levels of society. The relationship between rights, norms and rules can be broadly characterised as follows:

- **Rights define overarching principles that must be protected.** Rights are considered to be fundamental entitlements, establishing the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and ensuring that individuals are treated fairly and with dignity. They are usually (though not always) enshrined in law, constitutions, or international declarations.
- **Norms reflect shared values and expectations about behaviour.** International norms are shared understandings and standards that define how states, intergovernmental organisations, and globally significant non-state actors are expected to behave (Florini, 1996, p. 364; Martinsson, 2011, p. 2; Green, 2020, p. 1). They are rooted in shared beliefs, values, customs and practices. Norms can play a role in supporting and reinforcing rights by promoting behaviours that respect and protect entitlements (Jurkovich, 2019). Local norms, on the other hand, may vary across cultures and communities.
- **Rules provide specific guidelines and requirements for implementing and enforcing rights and norms.** They often take the form of regulations, formally (or sometimes informally) established to govern behaviour in a given context or setting. They provide a framework for implementing and enforcing rights and norms. Rules can be created by legal systems, institutions, organisations, or communities to encourage compliance with rights and norms. They often carry consequences or sanctions for non-compliance.

[3] Given the distinctiveness of the three themes, the nature of the literature associated with each theme, and the need to carry out searches according to thematic focus, this REA would be more appropriately viewed as three distinct REAs. Further, each of the three themes acts as an umbrella for a multitude of distinct issues within the theme – as illustrated by gender equality where three sub-themes are explored. Whilst this project presents an overarching assessment of the evidence, readers should treat efforts to collate and synthesise findings across themes with caution.

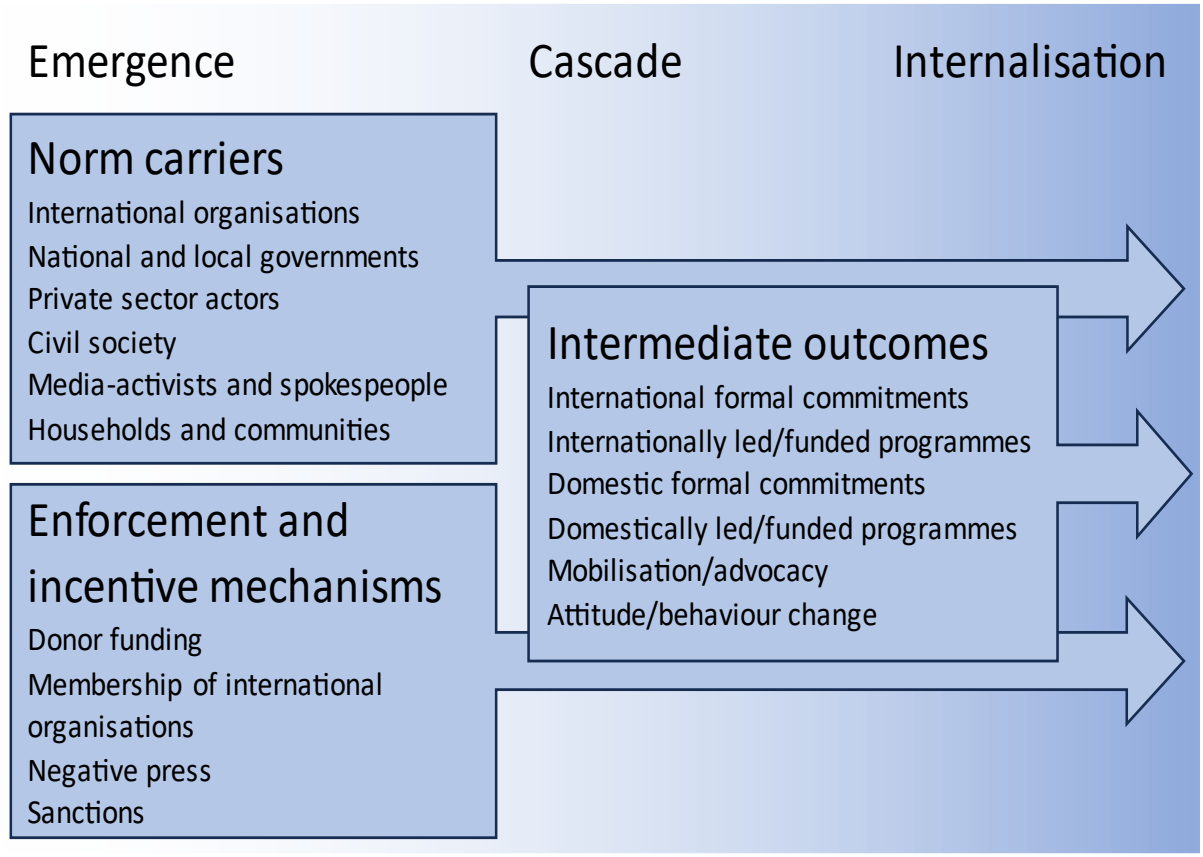
[4] The literature uses a range of different terms; for example, LGBT, LGBT+, LGBTI, or LGBTQI. This report uses the term LGBT+ but it should be understood as synonymous with other terms used in the literature.

The diffusion of global rules and norms can have positive, negative, mixed, or unclear outcomes. Positive global norms can provide a framework for international cooperation and good governance by promoting transparency, accountability, and the rule of law. The diffusion of global norms can also bring about social change by challenging traditional norms and values in societies. Negative outcomes, on the other hand, may include resistance and backlash, particularly in societies where values and norms are deeply entrenched. This can lead to social and political polarisation, and in some cases, conflict. The implementation of international norms can be uneven, with some countries and actors adopting them more readily than others, which can contribute to power imbalances and can lead to the marginalisation of groups or countries.

2.3 The norm lifecycle

The process of establishing rights as behavioural norms can be modelled using the idea of the 'norm lifecycle' – a series of stages of development and change that norms go through over time. For a right to become a norm, it must be widely recognised and accepted by society and by states. This typically involves advocacy and lobbying efforts by civil society groups, legal and policy reforms by governments, and the development of international standards and agreements by international organisations (Martinsson, 2011). Norms have their status solidified by being incorporated into legal and policy frameworks such as through the adoption of laws, the establishment of international agreements, or the development of cultural norms and practices. The process by which a right becomes a norm can be seen as having three principal stages: emergence, cascade, and internalisation (see, for example, Florini, 1996; Green, 2020; and Ruhl et al., 2020).

Figure 2: The norm lifecycle



Norms may come about through concerted efforts inspired by normative ideals such as justice or human rights, but can often be viewed as processes, or works in progress, rather than as finished products (Green, 2020). Global norms may be considered vague, fluid, and open to reinterpretation or appropriation for alternative purposes as they diffuse through the international system and are applied or interpreted at national levels (Martinsson, 2011; Green, 2020). Norm creation is often challenging and contentious, and the process may be resisted by cultural or social barriers, undermined by a lack of political will, or be poorly resourced (Martinsson, 2011).

This model is an extreme simplification of the process of norm transmission. The process by which a right becomes a norm is complex and multifaceted, and may involve a range of social, political, and legal factors. Not all norms will follow the 'norm lifecycle' pattern or go through all stages, and the length of time a norm spends at each stage can vary widely (for a further discussion, see Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). While the literature suggests the importance of complementing international work with domestic action, the pathways or mechanisms through which norms and rules are transformed into action and deliver results, and the factors that support or inhibit this process, are not fully clear. Research is also often siloed around specific norms, which means that there is little or no analysis that directly compares across different kinds of norms and values.

Norm emergence

Norms emerge when rules of appropriate behaviour are outlined and advocated for by norm entrepreneurs – individuals or organisations that set out to change the behaviour of others (Gilardi, 2012; Romaniuk & Grice, 2018). Examples of norm entrepreneurs include Henri Dunant, the founder of the International Committee of the Red Cross; US president Jimmy Carter for his work on international election monitoring; powerful states such as the US; and small states with moral legitimacy, such as South Africa under the leadership of Nelson Mandela (Florini, 1996; Martinsson, 2011; Gilardi, 2012). Powerful actors generally have more opportunities to advocate for norms (Martinsson, 2011). Civil society actors such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play an important role in terms of putting pressure on governments from below (Green, 2020). 'Mobilising people around new norms and ideas requires effectively framing the norm in order to raise awareness and attract support among the wider public, building alliances among distinct groups with similar objectives, and forging networks across multiple levels and scales of operation' (Green, 2020, p. 3).

Norm cascade

A norm is said to 'cascade' as it spreads and becomes adopted by a critical mass of states. Norm cascade is a socialisation process which rewards conformity and punishes non-compliance. Adhering to the rules is important because the reaction of the international community affects domestic legitimation and the power of a particular government. Factors that promote the cascade of norms include:

- **encouragement and signalling** by 'champion states' who socialise other states to adopt new norms, or at least emulate adoption (Green, 2020; Gilardi, 2002);
- **incentives** such as preferential trade arrangements or weapons deals, often offered by stronger states (Finnemore & Hollis, 2016);
- **coercion** in the form of economic sanctions or credible military threats (Finnemore & Hollis, 2016);
- **civil society pressure** in the form of protests, boycotts and best/worst lists which create rewards or punishments (Finnemore & Hollis, 2016);
- **a large turnover of decision-makers**, usually because of revolution or regime change (Florini, 1996);

- **clear failure of past behavioural norms** such as those of the previous generation of leadership (Florini, 1996);
- **the emergence of new issues** which require a new set of norms (Florini, 1996);
- **concrete programmes led by national or international actors** such as education and training, funding, conditionality, backroom diplomacy, or peacekeeping and reconstruction efforts (Cheeseman, 2015);
- **shared language, culture, and close interactions** among countries, including joint participation in networks of policy expertise – often built around common educational and training opportunities – and the activities of international consultants and organisations that can take key messages from one location to another (Evans, 2009; Cross, 2012);
- **strength of domestic non-governmental organisations** and links with international NGOs (Hicks, 2021); and
- **effectiveness of the judiciary** (Hicks, 2021).

Internalisation

Internalisation occurs when the norm becomes so deeply rooted that it is taken for granted as the only appropriate type of behaviour (Florini, 1996). At this stage, incentives and coercion are no longer necessary (Finnemore & Hollis, 2016).

The role of local adopters of norms in relation to the international 'norm entrepreneurs' is very important in the internalisation process (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Acharya, 2004). Such local adopters are not merely passive recipients of global norms, but agents in their own right who may play a critical role in 'norm localisation' (Acharya, 2004). The interaction and negotiation between global and local dynamics and actors matters (Fisher & Wilén, 2022; Poppe, Leininger & Wolff, 2019; Winanti & Hanif, 2020), but there has been a long running debate about exactly what conditions are necessary for international rules and norms to translate into significant change through norm localisation.

Norm carriers

States, organisations, and individuals adopt, embody, and share norms, and a wide range of types of entities can be involved in norm transmission.

- **International organisations** may, in consultation with member states, seek to establish norms and rules to govern behaviour of states and other actors in the international system. Examples include the United Nations, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Bank for International Settlements, Council of Europe, International Labour Organization (ILO) and International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) (Finnemore & Hollis, 2016).[5] This can include internationally agreed goals, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS).
- **National and local governments** may have significant roles in shaping and enforcing norms within a society and via their membership of international organisations. National governments may enact laws and regulations that shape norms at a broader level. Local governments, on the other hand, may have a more direct impact on norms by implementing policies and regulations that are specific to their communities. Governments at all levels can play a role in challenging and changing norms through education, awareness campaigns, and legal reforms (Acharya, 2004).

[5] Finnemore (1996) has written extensively on the role of international organisations in promoting global norms. In particular, she has explored how the development of international human rights norms has been influenced by actors such as the UN.

- **The private sector**, which includes businesses and corporations, may have an impact on global norms, particularly in areas such as human rights, labour standards, and environmental sustainability. Many businesses work on a global scale and have the ability to influence norms and standards in the countries where they operate as well as internationally. However, their influence can be negative as well as positive: businesses that engage in unethical practices such as bribery, corruption, and exploitation of workers can perpetuate harmful norms and negatively affect global standards (Acharya, 2004).
- **Civil society**, which includes non-governmental organisations, philanthropic organisations, community groups, and advocacy organisations, may play an important role in shaping global norms by advocating for policy changes, holding governments and businesses accountable, mobilising communities, and participating in international forums (Green, 2020).[6]
- **Media activists and spokespersons** may influence global norms by advocating, as individuals, for policy changes and promoting social and environmental causes. They can use their platforms to raise awareness about issues, mobilise support for policy changes, and pressurise governments and businesses to adopt ethical and sustainable practices (Green, 2020).[7]
- **Households and communities** may have an impact on shaping global norms through their daily actions, advocacy efforts, and participation in local and international forums. By prioritising sustainable practices, promoting positive social norms, and participating in advocacy efforts, they can contribute to the development of positive global norms that promote human rights, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

Intermediate outcomes

The extent to which norms become diffused, adopted, and internalised can be observed through intermediate outcomes such as commitments or actions by states and other actors.

- **International formal commitments** are agreements made by countries to take specific actions or to abide by rules or agreements on a global scale. Such commitments are enacted through formal agreements, treaties, or conventions between countries, international organisations, or other stakeholders (Gilardi, 2002).
- **Internationally led/funded programmes** are initiatives that are organised and funded by international organisations or countries to address global issues and achieve common goals (Cheeseman, 2015).
- **Domestic formal commitments** refer to pledges or promises made by a country to take a specific action or abide by certain rules or agreements within its own borders. These commitments are typically made through laws, regulations, and policies that are established and enforced by the government (Acharya, 2004; Fisher & Wilén, 2022).
- **Domestically led/funded programmes** are initiatives that are organised and funded by a country's own government to address domestic issues and achieve common goals (Acharya, 2004; Fisher & Wilén, 2022).
- **Mobilisation/advocacy** involves campaigns to raise awareness and advocate for action on specific issues. This might involve civil society or individual activists mobilising people to participate in protests, sign petitions, and contacting their elected officials to demand action. The goal of a mobilisation and advocacy campaign would be to create a groundswell of public support and pressure for action (Green, 2020).
- **Attitude/behaviour change**

[6] Sikkink (1998) has written on the role of transnational advocacy networks in promoting global human rights norms. Her work has focused on how these networks have helped to create new norms and push for the enforcement of existing norms through legal and political means.

[7] For example, activist Greta Thunberg has helped to raise awareness about the need for urgent action on climate change, inspiring people to demand action.

- **Attitude change** refers to a modification of an individual's overall evaluation or feelings towards a person, object, idea, or situation. It involves a shift in the way an individual thinks or feels about something, which may lead to changes in behaviour towards that thing. Attitude change can occur through persuasion, education, social influence, and personal experience.
- **Behaviour change** refers to a modification of an individual's actions or conduct in response to a particular situation or stimulus. It may involve a deliberate effort to change a behaviour, and can be motivated by personal goals, social norms, or external incentives such as rewards or punishments, or may also be unconscious.

Enforcement and incentive mechanisms

States and other actors can use a variety of formal and informal enforcement and incentive mechanisms to apply pressure to others to adopt norms.

- **Donor funding** refers to financial contributions provided by individuals, organisations, governments, or other entities to support a specific cause or project. Donor funding conditionality refers to the practice of attaching specific requirements or conditions to the financial assistance provided to a recipient country, organisation, or individual. These conditions may be related to specific policy reforms, institutional changes, or other actions that the donor wishes to promote or incentivise (Cheeseman, 2015).
- **Membership** of international organisations can serve as a mechanism for promoting and ensuring compliance with international norms, standards, and agreements. International organisations are typically composed of member states that have agreed to abide by certain rules and principles, and are subject to monitoring, evaluation, and enforcement mechanisms established by the organisation.
- **Negative press** can serve as an enforcement or incentive mechanism in various ways. It can be a powerful tool to expose wrongdoing and hold individuals or organisations accountable for their actions. Negative press coverage can also create public pressure for action or change and can have reputational and financial consequences for those being criticised.
- **Sanctions** refer to a range of economic, political, or diplomatic measures taken by one country or group of countries against another country or group of countries in order to encourage or compel changes in behaviour or policies. Sanctions are often used as a tool of foreign policy or international diplomacy, and can take various forms, such as trade embargoes, asset freezes, travel bans, or financial restrictions (Finnemore & Hollis, 2016).

3. Methodology summary

3.1. Objectives and approach

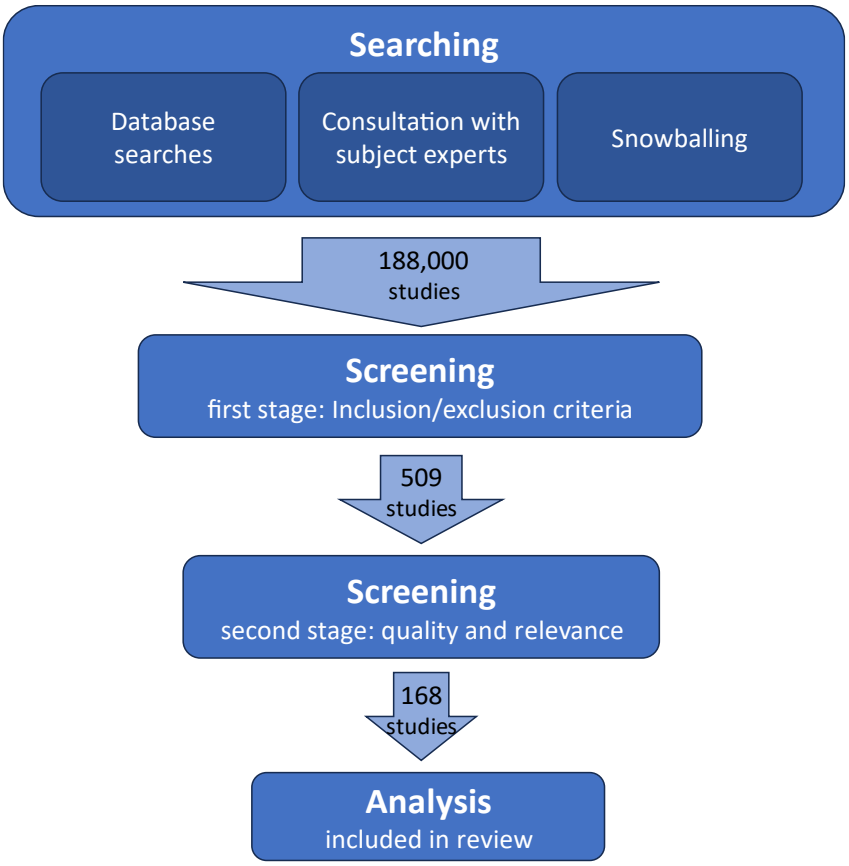
This report identifies the evidence available about how selected international norms are promoted and translated into action in low- and middle-income countries; discusses the quantity of evidence available; and presents the principal findings that emerge from the literature. It adapts approaches implemented by past FCDO-commissioned REAs and draws on those approaches identified by FCDO as best practice. In particular, this REA draws on the approach followed by Selby and Daoust (2021). Full details of the methodology are included in Annexes 1 through 5; only a brief summary is provided here. The methodology makes a distinction between the volume of evidence on a subject (which does not necessarily indicate the importance of the issue for any particular purpose, but may be influenced by factors such as research funding priorities, feasibility of research on the topic, and methodological challenges), and what the evidence says about the subject.

3.2. Searching, screening, and coding processes

To identify relevant literature, the research team searched online academic and publicly accessible databases relevant to research on international rules and norms; these sources are detailed in Annex 1. This REA included only academic publications (peer-reviewed journal articles) and research published by international organisations that play a pivotal role in diffusing norms (for example, the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)). The search strategy (detailed in Annex 2) involved searching for studies with the keywords (and synonyms for) 'international rules' and 'norms' across three domains: 'LGBT+', 'preventing financial crime', and 'gender equality'. To enhance the range of material searched, a 'snowballing' approach was also adopted, whereby the reference lists of particularly high-quality studies and existing reviews were explored for additional sources. Alongside this, experts and practitioners with expertise on international rules and norms – and who represented a diversity in methodological approaches, political views, geographical locations, and gender – were contacted and asked for additional recommendations. 188,088 potentially relevant journal articles and other reports were identified through the database and organisational searches.

Each study was initially screened against inclusion and exclusion criteria (detailed in Annex 3) which were based on the Terms of Reference for this project and the research team's knowledge of the literature. Search results were screened on the basis of metadata, titles, and abstracts (or executive summaries in the case of grey literature). At this stage, most candidates were discarded, and 509 studies were retained for closer analysis of the full text of the publication.

Figure 3: Process for identifying and selecting studies



Studies that passed the first stage of screening were reviewed in detail, and about two-thirds were excluded, mostly because closer reading revealed limited relevance to this REA, and in a small number of cases because they were identified as low quality. The quality assessment process (described in

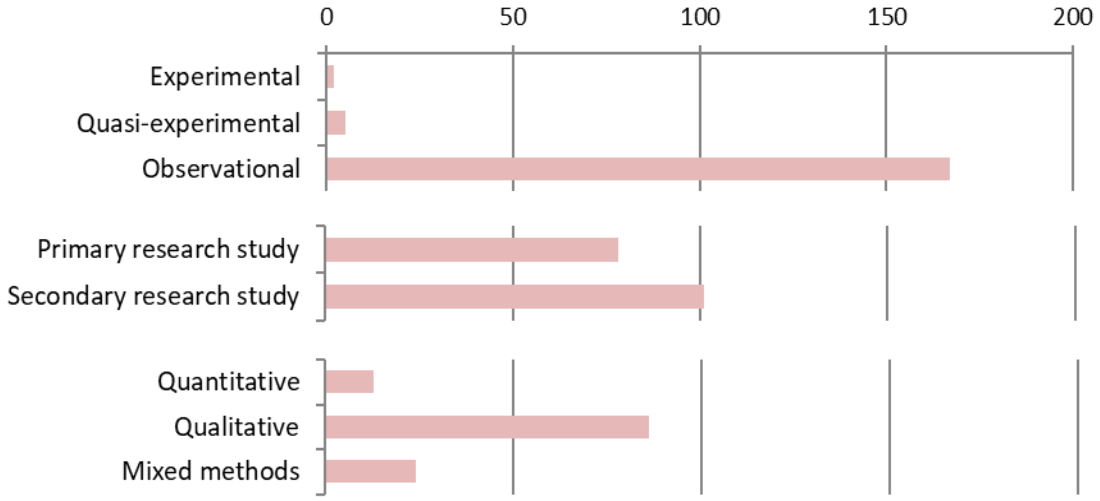
Annex 5) drew on FCDO's quality assessment framework and frameworks adopted in previous REAs (see Annex 5), and involved rating studies based on conceptual framing, transparency, appropriateness of research methods, and cogency. The vast majority of the studies were assessed as being high or moderate quality (79 and 88 studies, respectively), with only six identified as low quality. High quality ratings at this stage are to be expected because most of the materials were identified by searching academic journal databases, where all materials go through rigorous quality assurance processes before they are published. All of these 173 studies were catalogued and coded in a database[8] using the framework presented in Annex 4. All 173 studies are included in the descriptive statistics about the evidence base, but five of the low-quality studies were excluded from the analysis process,[9] so the findings and conclusions presented in this report draw on 168 studies.

3.3. Characteristics of the evidence base

Research design and methods

The evidence base is overwhelmingly observational in character (167 studies, 97% of the total), with very few experimental or quasi-experimental studies available, and is mostly qualitative in nature. The review identified similar quantities of primary and secondary research studies (78 and 101 studies respectively).

Figure 3: Research designs and methods used by studies in the evidence base



The vast majority of the papers included in the review were from peer-reviewed journals (79%) and were published by academic organisations or think tanks (83%), which is expected because the search process focused on academic journal databases and similar sources.

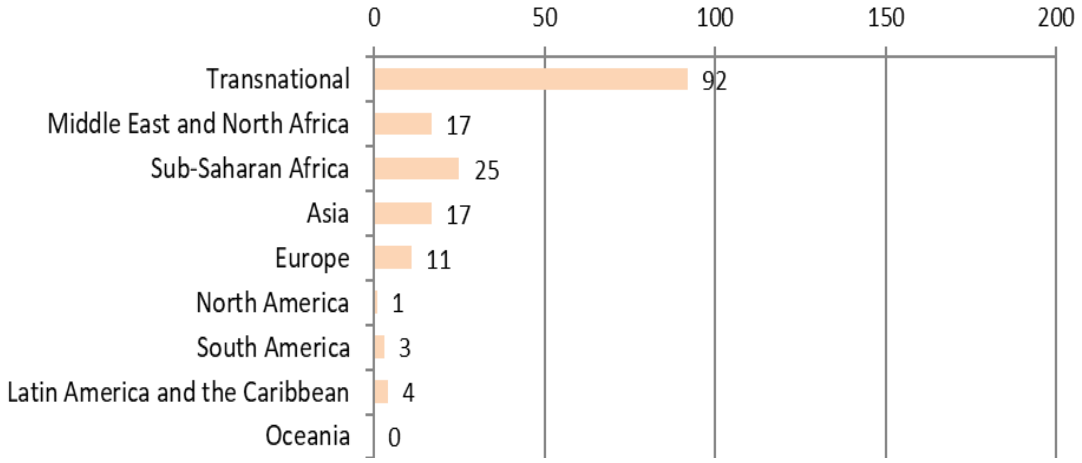
Geographic focus

The literature identified in this REA adopts a predominantly transnational focus (92 papers) with smaller evidence bases associated with sub-Saharan Africa (25 papers), the Middle East and North Africa (17 papers), and Asia (17 papers).

[8] The database used isan Excel spreadsheet adapted from a previous Rapid Evidence Assessment project, 'Security and Justice Evidence Mapping' (Bakrania, 2015). A copy of the database can be found at https://doi.org/10.25500/edata.bham.00000997

[9] One of the low-quality studies was included in the analysis as it covered LGBT+ rights, an area with a very limited evidence base (see section 4.1).

Figure 4: Geographic focus of studies in the evidence base



Note: figures do not add up to 173 because some papers address multiple geographies while others are non-geographic in their approach.

3.4. Limitations

The database of studies compiled by the research team should be viewed as indicative rather than comprehensive. Any literature search operates within constraints; in this review we aim to identify the most relevant and appropriate set of evidence available within the parameters and limitations of the study, and to be transparent about the selection process. Limitations of the study include:

- This REA is a 'rapid evidence assessment' produced under significant time constraints.
- The literature search was focused on articles catalogued in major academic journal databases and a selection of individual organisations' websites, which means that materials from some smaller independent and non-academic organisations may have been overlooked.
- The results of searches depend on the databases used and their proprietary searching and sorting algorithms.
- Searches were conducted only in English.
- Particular keywords were used to search for materials; different choices might have identified other relevant materials.
- The search was focused on the three themes chosen for this study (LGBT+ rights, preventing financial crime, and gender equality); searching for alternative themes might have revealed different materials.

To mitigate the effects of these limitations, the research team used a range of databases and search engines, consulted subject experts, and used the 'snowball' approach of following citations from relevant articles to identify additional sources.

3.5. Case studies

To complement the REA, the research team undertook two case studies to explore the political dynamics through which international norms and rules translate into action in low- and middle-income countries. The case studies were selected based on evidence from the REA about which countries and norms could be particularly useful for highlighting the key dynamics at play with reference to the kinds of strategies and approaches used by and available to FCDO. The aim of the case studies was to go into greater depth on the process through which internalisation did or did not take place in two of the themes that were the focus of the REA, namely LGBT+ rights and gender equality. The two case studies were:

- Case study 1: LGBT+ norms in sub-Saharan Africa and ‘anti-homosexuality’ legislation in Uganda.
- Case study 2: Gender norms in Costa Rica and Malawi.

4. Evidence review findings

4.1 LGBT+ rights

4.1.1 Norms examined

The REA looked at the following norms in relation to LGBT+ rights:

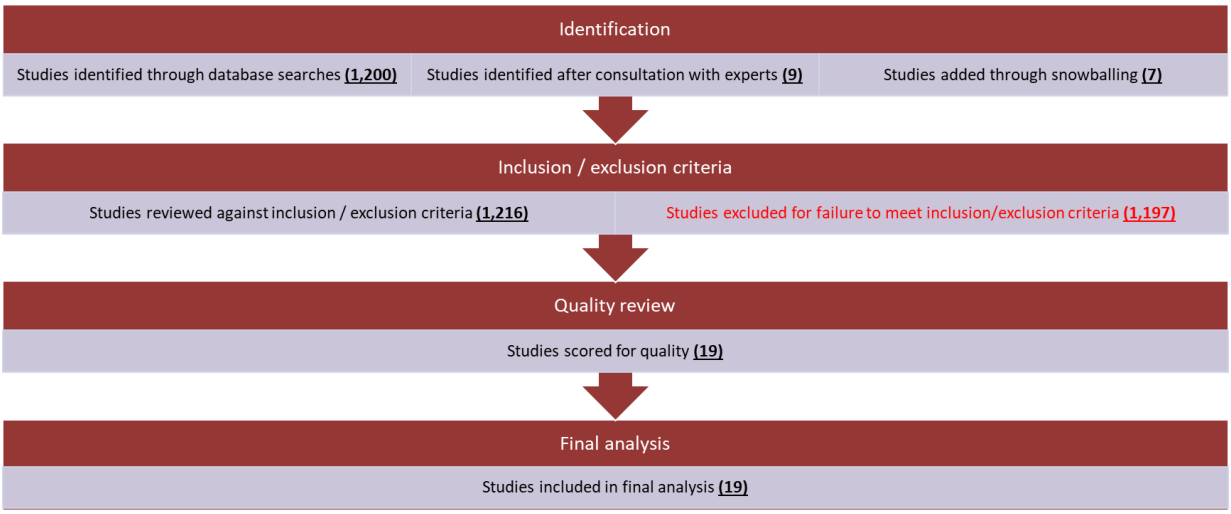
- protection against violence or discrimination for LGBT+ persons
- protection against violence or discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity
- protection against violence or discrimination for men who have sex with men
- establishment and enforcement of legislation banning transphobia
- establishment and enforcement of legislation banning homophobia

4.1.2 Characteristics of the evidence base

The evidence base on this theme was very limited, and far smaller than for the other norms examined in this project. While there are more substantial bodies of literature on the status of LGBT+ rights in specific countries, there is far less on transmission of norms. Throughout this section of the report, all findings should be considered with the fact in mind that they are based on a small number of papers.

The main sources of literature were Google Scholar and Scopus, which generated 630 and 327 results respectively. Other databases returned around 250 results in total, and a small number of papers were recommended by the experts consulted for this REA and identified through snowballing. After application of the inclusion/exclusion criteria, 19 papers were retained for quality review.

Figure 5: PRISMA[10] diagram (LGBT+ rights) [11]



The papers selected for inclusion largely comprised academic papers. Of the 19 papers, 18 were of either high (7) or moderate (11) quality. One was rated as low quality, but due to the scarcity of available evidence on this sub-theme, this paper was included in the final review. The majority of

[10] PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) is a standard for reporting in systematic reviews and meta-analyses (http://prisma-statement.org).

[11] Given the limited evidence base identified in this theme all studies identified have been included in the final analysis, including one paper which was assessed as low quality.

papers were based on qualitative research. The geographic regions featuring most frequently were Africa and Eastern Europe, a few papers looked at countries in other parts of the world, and the remainder were transnational (global).

The REA found (notably through the papers identified by an expert) a growing body of literature on transmission of 'anti-LGBT+' norms – efforts to undermine LGBT+ rights by Christian groups, some of which are based in Western democracies such as the US. While these fell outside the scope of this REA, this emerging trend will be relevant in the context of future policymaking and programme design.

Evidence gaps: There is a severe lack of evidence on the transmission of norms about LGBT+ rights. Some norm carriers – notably activists and the media – are weakly represented in the evidence base. The literature largely focuses on Africa and Eastern Europe, and many other parts of the world where LGBT+ rights are a major issue (for example, South and Southeast Asia) are not represented. Clearly, the context and challenges faced in South or Southeast Asia will be very different to those in Africa or Eastern Europe; this points to the need for context-specific research. There is also little evidence on the effects of norm transmission; that is, on whether and to what extent these effects bring about improvements for LGBT+ persons.

4.1.3 Norm carriers

Volume of evidence

A moderate amount of evidence is available about the role of international organisations in promoting international norms for LGBT+ rights (16 articles). Limited evidence is available on the roles of national and local governments and civil society; no evidence about other carriers was found.

Table 1: Number of studies related to norm carriers for the LGBT+ rights theme

Norm carriers and consensus mechanisms	Number of papers addressing LGBT+ norms
International organisations	16
National and local government	8
Private sector	0
Civil society	6
Media	0
Activists/spokespersons	0
Household/community	0

Findings

Transnational advocacy, whereby there are links between international/regional civil society organisations (CSOs) and those operating at national/local levels, has a positive but small impact in promoting norms for LGBT+ rights, although the evidence on this is limited (seven studies). One study found that involving external actors can be especially important in countries where CSOs face a hostile domestic environment, as externalisation of the issue can lead to pressure for change, but the study also highlighted the risks of a negative backlash, where externalisation could be seen as unpatriotic or undermining national sovereignty (Godzisz & Mole, 2022). Another study found that *who* carries out transnational advocacy can be a determining factor, finding that international LGBT+ CSOs were seen as more effective than international human rights CSOs (Velasco, 2018). Two papers (Dioli, 2011; Aantjes et al., 2022) found that even where transnational advocacy does lead to the adoption of legislation aimed to protect LGBT+ rights, this can be cosmetic and not likely to produce meaningful

improvements, unless it is accompanied by social change. Another paper also found that norm diffusion through legislation will not work in a societal environment where there is a lack of tolerance for LGBT+ persons (O'Dwyer, 2018).

There is insufficient evidence on the role of development cooperation in promoting norms for LGBT+ rights to reach well-supported conclusions. Six papers looked at the effectiveness of the different approaches that can be taken under the heading of 'development cooperation', including aid cuts, programme design, modes of aid delivery and internal staffing policies. Only a small body of literature (four papers) examines the role of development cooperation in transmitting LGBT+ norms, or how promotion of LGBT+ rights has evolved in development cooperation. One study found that the promotion of LGBT+ rights as a norm was first advocated through HIV/AIDS programming, but this tended to focus on men, potentially leaving out other vulnerable groups. More recent attempts to promote LGBT+ norms have used human rights perspectives or sought to mainstream LGBT+ issues in development programming and address the wider economic and social exclusion of LGBT+ persons (Haste et al., 2016). This study also identifies obstacles to programming for LGBT+ rights, including use of a one size-fits-all approach and the fact that LGBT+ rights are still not recognised as a development priority.

There is limited evidence that the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), has been a leader in pushing LGBT+ norms in development cooperation (one paper) (Nilsson et al., 2013). The success factors reported for SIDA are: the high level political commitment by the Swedish government; the broad approaches taken by embassies and organisations, combining political dialogue, cultural events and organisational support; the opening up of space for LGBT+ organisations and activists to participate in mainstream human rights work; the efforts taken to listen to and support the locally defined agenda and to involve LGBT+ activists in shaping the programmes; the regional approach taken in support of activists in repressive countries; the long-term and flexible engagement, and the core support to key actors; and the existence of committed staff members in organisations and embassies, who are open to opportunities.

There is limited evidence that international development agencies are more effective in promoting international norms for LGBT+ rights when they work through local partners, use long-term and flexible funding arrangements, and have inclusive recruitment practices. Three papers (Cook & Vieira, 2016; Kämpf, 2015; Nilsson et al., 2013) collated lessons and success factors for development agencies. These include working through local CSOs/partners and letting them 'be in the driving seat' as opposed to simply implementing a donor agenda, having long-term and flexible funding arrangements, and having inclusive recruitment practices for their own staff.

4.1.4 Outcomes

Volume of evidence

There is limited evidence about domestic formal commitments to implementation of international norms for LGBT+ rights, and very limited evidence about other outcomes. It is noteworthy that so few papers look at outcomes related to real progress 'on the ground', such as domestically led/funded programmes or behaviour/attitude change. One possible explanation for such outcomes not being commonly studied is that while some progress is being made in transmission of LGBT+ norms to middle- and low-income countries, such norms have largely not yet been internalised. However, it could also be due to other factors; for example, formal commitments are relatively easy to assess, while it is much harder to assess attitude or behaviour change.

Table 2: Number of studies related to outcomes for the LGBT+ rights theme

Outcomes	Number of papers addressing LGBT+ norms
International formal commitments	5
International led/funded programmes	5
Domestic formal commitments	10
Domestic led/funded programmes	0
Mobilisation/advocacy	4
Attitude/behaviour change	1

Findings

International diplomacy, conventions, and formal mandates have played a role in promoting international norms for LGBT+ rights although the evidence in this area is limited (six studies). Sweden was described in one paper as the global leader in using international diplomacy to advocate for LGBT+ rights, providing the model and framework for other countries to follow (Rainer, 2022). The US has also helped this issue to gain recognition and momentum due to its huge influence in the international community (Rainer, 2022). Another paper found that Brazil has been an international leader on LGBT+ rights, despite failure to promote such rights domestically – possibly because human rights diplomacy offers a channel for social movements which face resistance at home, and due to support from the West (Nogueira, 2017).

There is a potential that international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) could be used to promote LGBT+ rights norms (Holtmaat & Post, 2015) although this was only discussed in one paper. While certain provisions of CEDAW could in principle be used for this, in practice LGBT+ rights are hardly mentioned in CEDAW Committee documentation. There is also a risk that using CEDAW in this way could have negative effects, not just on LGBT+ persons, but also on women. This is because opposition to homosexuality (or anything not consistent with heterosexuality within marriage) could also damage women's rights if attempted through the same CEDAW vehicle (Holtmaat & Post, 2015, p. 334). Furthermore, any legislation or policies brought about through CEDAW are likely to be ineffective in the absence of social change. Nonetheless, CEDAW is leading to some recognition of the link between gender discrimination and discrimination against LGBT+ persons.

The European Union (EU) has made more progress than the United Nations (UN) in advocating LGBT+ rights norms. One study attributed the difference primarily to greater political opportunities in the EU compared with the UN (Swiebel, 2009). Time was ripe for widening EU competences, and there was help from friendly elites who had their own reasons for wanting to expand the agenda; there was also growing concern about racism, and the 'en vogue' nature of human rights language helped to establish issue linkages. Another study compared progress made within the EU between older and newer member states, focusing on adoption of same-sex union legislation; it found that older member states were more motivated by domestic factors, especially economic modernisation, while in newer EU member states, same-sex union legislation was more the result of transnational advocacy and links (Ayoub, 2015).

4.1.5 Enforcement and incentive mechanisms

There is very little evidence available about enforcement and incentive mechanisms for LGBT+ norms. As discussed above, typical enforcement and incentive mechanisms including aid conditionality, involvement of external organisations, and the use of international conventions can all have negative effects. It seems likely that real progress on LGBT+ norms will only come about through

social change, and enforcement and incentive mechanisms are inadequate to achieve attitude change across society.

Enforcement and incentive mechanisms	Number of papers addressing LGBT+ norms
Donor funding	6
Membership	2
Negative press	1
Sanctions	0
Other	0

However, there is clear but limited evidence that aid conditionality does not work and could have very negative effects, including on LGBT+ people (three studies). One study comparing the impact of aid conditionality and transnational advocacy concluded that the latter was far more effective, and recommended that those wanting to advance LGBT+ rights should invest in local LGBT+ CSOs while trying to limit the impression of coercive Western imposition (Velasco, 2019).

Case study 1: LGBT+ norms in sub-Saharan Africa and 'anti-homosexuality' legislation in Uganda

LGBT+ norms in sub-Saharan Africa: While gender equality norms have now largely attained global consensus – gaps between commitments and implementation notwithstanding – those related to LGBT+ rights have not, particularly outside Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and the Americas. Indeed, LGBT+ rights have become a normative battleground in the domestic and international politics of a range of African states since the 1990s, with some governments introducing – or expanding – legislation focused on the criminalisation of homosexuality and its notional "promotion" (Smith & Cheeseman, 2023; Reid, 2022).

As one might expect from such a diverse continent, the African LGBT+ rights normative landscape is a mixed one. Decriminalisation of homosexuality and homosexual "acts" has been introduced across many Southern African and Lusophone states since the 2010s – including Cape Verde (2004), Lesotho (2012), São Tomé and Principe (2012), Mozambique (2015), Botswana (2019), and Angola (2021) – and some of these states have also introduced anti-discrimination legislation in recent years (Miguel, 2023; Reid, 2022). South Africa – whose 1996 constitution was the first in the world to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation – decriminalised homosexuality in 1998 and became the first, and to date only, African state to legalise same-sex marriage in 2006 – though LGBT+ people continue to face homophobic violence, particularly outside major cities (Rakhetsi, 2021).

These developments can be explained, to a significant degree, by some of the findings summarised in this REA. In particular, they underscore that while the passage of legislation can sometimes prompt a change in attitudes, real progress on LGBT+ norms generally comes about mainly through **meaningful social change itself**. Though not a perfect proxy, the percentage of citizens who would 'accept' having homosexual neighbours, for example, is highest in Southern and Lusophone Africa, particularly in Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Cape Verde (Freude & Waites, 2022; Miguel, 2023). Historical legacies and cultural/national identity – and how governments engage with or leverage this – are also important. Portugal did not extend its domestic prohibition of "vices against nature" to its African colonies until late in its imperial project – unlike, for example, the UK (Miguel, 2023).[12] Some

[12] It is notable, in this regard, that 66% of Commonwealth countries have laws which criminalise homosexuality compared with 33% of former French colonies and territories (Smith & Cheeseman, 2023).

scholars have linked this to greater tolerance of homosexuality in contemporary Lusophone Africa, albeit underscoring that the Portuguese imperial approach, in this regard, linked more to a lack of interest in regulating African sexualities than an inherent acceptance of diverse sexual and gender identities (Gomes da Costa Santos & Waites, 2022). The repeal of colonial era legislation on homosexuality has also been presented by a number of Southern African politicians and judges as an anti-colonial act, and an assertion of sovereignty (Africanews, 2022; Burke, 2019).

Elsewhere on the continent, however, governments have increasingly cast LGBT+ advocacy – and non-heteronormative sexual and gender identities themselves – as external, Western agendas which offend 'African' cultural norms and undermine African sovereignty. Indeed, norms around LGBT+ rights are contested and rejected across a range of African states – including Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania – and there is limited support for them among populations who are, in general, socially conservative, religious, and rurally based (Reid, 2022). A range of African governments have instrumentalised this – and the idea of homosexuality (in particular) as an alien, Western threat to 'African' identity – to whip up populist support or to redirect national conversations during times of political or economic stagnation (Bompani & Valois, 2017; Nyanzi, 2013; Rao, 2020).

Existing evidence suggests that in such challenging circumstances, **it is critical that local CSOs/NGOs are 'in the driving seat'** in advocating for LGBT+ norms rather than being seen to be implementers of an external agenda. Local NGO/CSO advocacy – at times within broader transnational advocacy networks – were central in many of the cases highlighted above, with pressure from foreign powers limited or non-existent (Brown, 2023; Gomes da Costa Santos & Waites, 2022; Viljoen, 2019). As the case of Uganda demonstrates, the converse can also be true – explicit external pressure has a mixed record in driving change and can often be counterproductive.

Evidence for this can be seen in the case of Uganda, where the engagement of Western aid partners in opposing anti-homosexuality legislation during the 2010s is argued by some scholars to have triggered a backlash which has worsened the position of local LGBT+ advocacy groups. This case study – explored below – further underlines the importance of placing local organisations 'in the driving seat' when supporting international norms that do not enjoy generalised or widespread local support (Brown, 2023).

'Anti-homosexuality' legislation in Uganda: During the 2010s, Uganda became a major focus of international attention and engagement around LGBT+ rights following the 2009 introduction of an 'Anti-Homosexuality Bill' by ruling party MP David Bahati. The proposed legislation, a private member's bill, recommended life imprisonment for 'the offence of homosexuality' and the death penalty for those held to have committed 'aggravated homosexuality', defined as a same-sex sexual act with various categories of persons, including people under the age of 18 and people with disabilities. The bill was widely condemned by Western politicians, including the US president and secretary of state, the UK prime minister, and ministers from Canada, France, and Sweden. Initially the Ugandan government distanced itself from the bill by arguing that it had not introduced it or been briefed on its contents (Dasandi, 2022).

Strong Western donor pressure was placed publicly and privately on the Ugandan president, Yoweri Museveni, to commit to vetoing any bill that made it to his desk and threats of aid cuts were made, directly and indirectly, as debate on the legislation raged (Nyanzi & Karamagi, 2015). This led to the bill increasingly being framed domestically by its supporters – who came to include parliamentary Speaker Rebecca Kadaga – as a defence of 'African' culture and Ugandan sovereignty against Western neo-colonialism. After a range of delaying tactics and the removal of the death penalty, Museveni – no ally of LGBT+ people himself – signed the bill in February 2014, declaring to Western powers that

he did so to protect Uganda against 'social imperialism, [and an attempt] to impose social values' (Biryabarema, 2014).

Though the 2013 Anti-Homosexuality Act was struck down by Uganda's Constitutional Court on a technicality in 2014, it remains a live issue. A new Anti-Homosexuality Bill – this time introduced by an opposition MP – was recently passed by the Ugandan Parliament. This legislation was returned to parliament by Museveni for reconsideration in April 2023, with the Ugandan leader stating that he 'totally agree[s] with the bill' but wishes legislators to consider 'the issue of rehabilitation [of those who "renounce" homosexuality]' in a revised version (Okiror, 2023a). Museveni signed the bill in May 2023, precipitating local activists to petition for a temporary injunction to prevent the implementation of the law (Kafeero, 2023; Okiror, 2023b). A decision is yet to be taken by the Ugandan Constitutional Court on this petition at the time of writing.

In line with the findings of this REA, three interrelated points can be taken from this case with regard to the translation of international LGBT+ norms into action:

1. **Public criticism by international actors and/or aid suspensions (threatened or actual) are ineffective norm promotion or enforcement mechanisms and can backfire**. In the case of Uganda, Western aid donor statements and aid cuts (or threats to do so) have provided rhetorical "ammunition" to Ugandan supporters of anti-LGBT+ legislation and have worsened the situation for Ugandan LGBT+ advocacy groups who are accused of being Western 'stooges' (Dasandi, 2022). Research by Dasandi suggests that international actors' use of private diplomacy alone would probably have been more effective in lobbying Kampala on the 2009 bill and that public donor positioning on this issue was interpreted by many Ugandans as hypocritical – since donors have taken weaker positions on other human rights issues in Uganda – and principally focused on signalling to Western constituencies (Brown, 2023; Dasandi, 2022; see also Fisher, 2015).

2. **There is a growing focus in some African states on 'pre-emptive' efforts to resist diffusion of LGBT+ norms, often with close support and guidance from conservative US evangelical groups**. Nuñez-Mietz and García Iommi (2017) suggest that the successful efforts of LGBT+ rights advocates at the transnational level has precipitated the rise of counter-activists who introduce pre-emptive legislation, such as Nigeria's 2014 prohibition of same-sex marriage, as a means to 'defend' the nation against the 'foreign threat' of homosexuality. They describe this phenomenon as 'norm immunization'.

   The counter-activists in question are themselves part of transnational (counter-)advocacy networks which include African politicians, clerics, and civil society leaders, as well as US conservative evangelical groups (Thoreson, 2014). In the case of Uganda, US evangelical groups such as the Fellowship Foundation played a critical role in sponsoring and shaping the framing of the 2009 bill, spending more than US$20 million in Uganda between 2008-18 (Independent (Kampala), 2019; Namubiru & Wepukhulu, 2020; Nyanzi, 2013). Evidence of the continued close association between the US evangelical right and Uganda's anti-homosexuality movement can be found in the language of the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act itself, which repeats the familiar US conservative evangelical discourse of protecting children and the family (Basalirwa, 2023, p. 1(c); Smith & Cheeseman, 2023).

3. **Support for local actors and advocacy organisations is critical.** Paszat (2017) notes that work by some Ugandan advocacy and human rights organisations – notably the Civil Society Coalition and Uganda Human Rights Coalition – helped to slow down the progress of the 2009 bill. She also suggests that strategic lobbying by these actors, in tandem with international

partners, helped to reinforce divisions within the Ugandan Cabinet and ruling party around the bill, ensuring that its 2013 passage took place without a parliamentary quorum. This provided a technicality which the Ugandan Constitutional Court used to strike down the act, following a petition submitted by a coalition of more than 50 CSOs.

4.2 Preventing financial crime

4.2.1 Norms examined

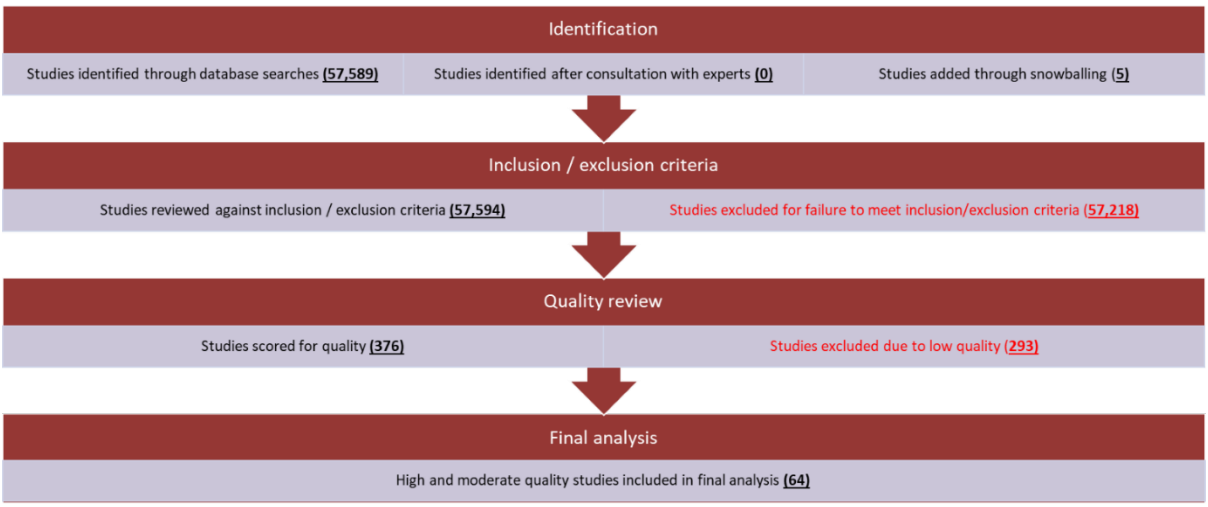
The REA looked at the following norms in relation to preventing financial crime:

- There should be a 'whole of government' approach to fighting tax/financial crime.
- There should be global standards for preventing money laundering.

4.2.2 Characteristics of the evidence base

There is a substantial body of literature on the diffusion of norms related to money laundering, anti-money laundering policies, and the international organisations involved in regulating money laundering and counterterrorism finance (54 articles). There is limited literature on norms relating to 'whole of government' approaches to tax and financial crime (15 articles), most of which comes from the OECD, along with a few articles in law journals. The literature on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is extensive, but these articles cover similar issues and the vast majority simply describe the history and functioning of the FATF. The majority of these articles come from academic journals in the fields of law, international relations, governance or public policy. The geographic focus of the literature was mainly transnational, although a handful of articles discussed how international norms were implemented at the country level.

Figure 6: PRISMA[13] diagram (preventing financial crime)



Evidence gaps: There appears to be a shortage of research on how norms for combating financial crime are implemented at the national level, including on how national legislation on financial crime is implemented, how effective it is as a deterrent, the challenges faced in the implementation process, and the extent to which the norms are internalised. This review did not find academic or grey literature

[13] PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) is a standard for reporting in systematic reviews and meta-analyses (http://prisma-statement.org).

on bottom-up approaches for tackling tax or financial crime and money laundering in middle- and low-income countries.

4.2.3 Norm carriers

Volume of evidence

There is extensive evidence about how international organisations promote international norms for preventing money laundering. However, the evidence on the role of international organisations in promoting norms to reduce tax/financial crime is limited. Most of the available evidence relates to the roles of international organisations in promoting norms on money laundering and tax, and the role of the private sector in promoting norms on money laundering. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the OECD Convention on Bribery are the two mecha most frequently discussed in the literature.

Table 3: Number of studies related to norm carriers for the financial crime theme

Norm carriers and consensus mechanisms	Financial crime & money laundering	Financial crime & tax
International organisations	47	14
National and local government	7	9
Private sector	16	4
Civil society	2	4
Media	0	2
Activists/spokespersons	1	0
Household/community	0	0

Findings

The large transnational literature is very positive about the impact of international organisations in diffusing norms on tax and financial crime, and in particular on money laundering. The literature notes both soft power elements, and measures such as being placed on the FATF list of high-risk jurisdications, as inducements for compliance with international norms on money laundering (Nanyun & Nasiri, 2021). The FATF list can function as a signal to the market that doing business in high-risk jurisdictions will lead to scrutiny of the transactions (Nance, 2018).

The large transnational literature on money laundering standards generally concurs that the FATF has been an effective carrier of norms to reduce money laundering. Approximately 200 countries and jurisdictions have committed to implement FATF guidelines for detecting and preventing money laundering and terrorism financing, and the FATF monitors countries' implementation of these standards through nine associate member organisations,[14] global partners, the IMF and the World Bank. Countries that do not implement FATF standards can suffer penalties by being designated for increased monitoring or as a high-risk jurisdiction (Alexander, 2001, Nance, 2018). The role of regional FATF bodies is particularly highlighted as a constructive mechanism for assessing compliance. However, there are a few articles that argue that implementation of FATF standards can be weak in some low- and middle-income countries; see the 'outcomes' section below.

[14] This includes the Asia/Pacific group on money laundering (APG), Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF), Eurasian Group (EAG), Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group (ESAAMLG), Financial Action Task Force of Latin America (GAFILAT), Intergovernmental Action Group Against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA), Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF) and The Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures (MONEYVAL) FATF global network.

Although the OECD is the main convenor of 'whole of government' approaches to fighting tax and financial crime, there is insufficient evidence to determine how successful its efforts have been. The OECD has taken the lead in developing policies for curbing financial crimes such as tax evasion, money laundering, and terrorist financing (OECD, 2012). Examples of initiatives include the Oslo Dialogue in March 2011, aimed at fostering an international dialogue on financial crime, and a series of papers titled 'Improving Cooperation between Tax Authorities and Anticorruption Authorities in Combating Tax Crime and Corruption'. The OECD has encouraged member and non-member countries to adopt a 'whole of government' approach, which calls for closer collaboration among crime and intelligence agencies, revenue services and treasuries for the purpose of detecting, investigating and prosecuting tax and financial crime (OECD, 2012; OECD, 2018). The sharing of information among different branches of government is a key component of the 'whole of government' approach (OECD, 2017; Maxwell & Artindtall, 2017). Under the 'whole of government' approach, revenue authorities play a critical role in monitoring tax evasion as well as identifying and reporting suspected serious crimes such as bribery, corruption, money laundering and terrorism financing (OECD, 2015). The evidence base on this issue is small, however (15 articles), and does not provide sufficient details of how successful the OECD has been in terms of persuading non-member countries to implement 'whole of government' or 'joined up government' approaches to monitoring tax and financial crimes.

There is limited evidence that peer-to-peer assessments and mutual accountability frameworks used by the OECD and the FATF to monitor and assess compliance with standards have had positive effects. These frameworks encompass a large number of countries, including countries which are not necessarily members of these organisations.

National legislation acts as a carrier of norms for preventing money laundering and on 'whole of government' approaches to fighting tax and financial crime, but the quantity of evidence available is limited (seven and nine studies, respectively). This small evidence base describes how a few countries responded to international norms by developing local legislation to curb money laundering or to facilitate 'whole of government' approaches to fighting tax/financial crime.

Private sector organisations, notably banks, can play an important role in curbing illicit financial flows, but may be less involved in preventing tax crimes. More specifically, private sector institutions can decide to reduce their business dealings with countries that are on the FATF high-risk list (Nance, 2018). The REA identified 16 studies that referred to the private sector as a carrier of norms for preventing money laundering, but only four articles on preventing tax crimes.

4.2.4 Outcomes

Volume of evidence

There is moderate evidence about how countries have adopted international norms on money laundering in legislation or policy, and limited evidence about the adoption of norms on tax and financial crime (29 and 9 articles, respectively). Adoption usually entails enacting national legislation to curtail money laundering or commitments by countries to adhere to international norms such as the FATF recommendations. Countries may also pursue policies relating to the 'whole of government' approach for fighting tax and financial crime.

Table 4: Number of studies related to outcomes for the financial crime theme

Outcomes	Financial crime & money laundering	Financial crime & tax
International formal commitments	26	11

International led/funded programmes	8	6
Domestic formal commitments	27	9
Domestic led/funded programmes	2	2
Mobilisation/advocacy	2	2
Attitude/behaviour change	8	1
Unclear	4	3
Mixed	8	2

Findings

Scholars based in low- and middle-income countries tend to be pessimistic about the extent to which norms can be meaningfully implemented. Although the quantity of literature produced by scholars in LMICs is small, there is much concern that poorer countries lack the capacity to implement norms including several of the FATF recommendations (Goredema, 2003; Maguchu, 2017). The challenges faced by these countries include physical infrastructure constraints, skills shortages and other capacity limitations. For example, one study finds that the Central Bank of Bahrain and the Bank of Morocco were able to provide greater supervision of their banking and money exchange services to comply with FATF recommendations than the Central Bank of Jordan, which only managed to carry out a small number of supervisory functions because of the lack of human resources (Murrar & Barakat, 2021). One study mentioned that weak legal or institutional systems, inadequate information technology and poor record keeping undermine coordination among law enforcement agencies and intelligence sharing, which are needed to implement the norms (Nanyun & Nasiri, 2021). Two studies state that poorer countries also have limited ability to undertake 'know your customer' due diligence in the banking and insurance sectors (Chitimira & Munedzi, 2022; De Koker, 2003). Two studies mentioned that developing countries struggle to balance the need for wider access to financial services among their citizens with international norms for customer due diligence. For example, in the 1990s, South Africa asked for an exemption for some FATF standards so that domestic banks could provide accounts and financial services to millions of poor black South Africans who were 'unbanked' during the preceding apartheid era. Although the literature questioning the effectiveness of FATF as a carrier of norms to prevent money laundering at the country level is small, the stark contrast between these articles and the much larger transnational evidence base, which is generally more optimistic about the effectiveness of the FATF, indicates that more studies are needed to clarify and resolve this discrepancy in the evidence base. Hence, more research on the implementation of FATF guidelines in middle- and low-income countries is required to accurately gauge how effective the FATF is with respect to preventing money laundering.

Some middle-income countries, such as China and Vietnam, find it useful to comply with the FATF recommendations and participate in these international organisations in order to influence policy (two articles) (Heilmann & Schulte-Kulkmann, 2011, Le Nguyen, 2014). There is also a soft power benefit for them in terms of being seen as part of the club. In this case there is greater political will on the part of national governments to comply with the international norms for preventing financial crime.

4.2.5 Enforcement and incentive mechanisms

Volume of evidence

There is extensive evidence about the role of negative publicity (in the form of official 'naming and shaming') as a mechanism to enforce or incentivise the diffusion of norms on money laundering (32

articles). Other enforcement and incentive mechanisms, and their impacts on financial crimes and tax, are less well studied.

Table 5: Number of studies related to enforcement and incentive mechanisms for the financial crime theme

Enforcement and incentive mechanisms	Financial crime & money laundering	Financial crime & tax
Donor funding	5	7
Membership	12	7
Negative press	32	8
Sanctions	8	3
Other	5	0

Findings

The naming and shaming element of the FATF high-risk list and its list of countries being monitored, is a key enforcer of international norms on money laundering. Most of the extensive transnational literature highlights this element. Countries on the either of these lists may find it difficult to borrow money or garner support from international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank, as well as the private sector. Middle- and low-income countries that have been criticised by the FATF, or have been put on the FATF high-risk list or its list of countries being monitored, have collaborated with the FATF to improve their rating or be removed from these lists. In contrast, the OECD does not have mechanisms to incentivise, monitor or otherwise enforce the norms on tax/financial crime, so compliance with 'whole of government' approaches for regulating tax and financial crime varies among countries. The FATF and the OECD occasionally provide technical support to help countries comply with international norms on tax or financial crime and money laundering.

4.3 Gender equality

4.3.1 Norms examined

The REA looked at the following norms in relation to gender:

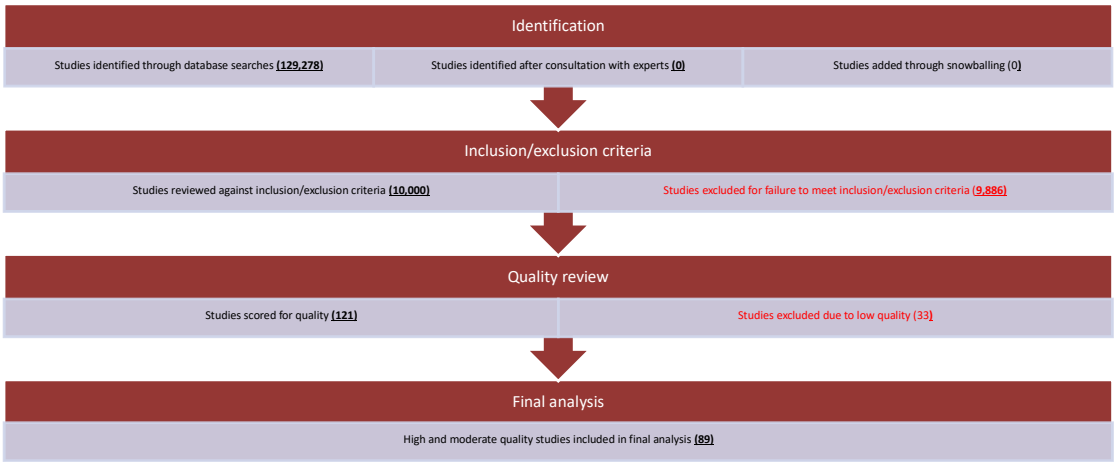
- gender and civil rights (that there should be no discrimination against individuals with regard to civil rights and legal rights based on gender)
- gender and political participation (that there should be no discrimination against individuals with regard to political participation based on gender)
- gender and work (that there should be no discrimination against individuals in the workplace based on gender)

4.3.2 Characteristics of the evidence base

There is a very large body of evidence on gender equality issues; using the selection criteria and process described in section 3 and the annexes to this report, 89 papers were identified as relevant to this theme and sub-themes (some papers are classified under more than one theme):

- gender and civil rights – 46 papers
- gender and political participation – 36 papers
- gender and work – 30 papers

Figure 7: PRISMA[15] diagram (gender equality)



The geographic focus of the literature included 39 papers with a transnational approach, 35 papers that adopted a single country focus, and 11 papers with a multi-country focus. The most common country of focus was Türkiye (7 papers). The three gender sub-themes investigated here span a wide range of aspects of norm diffusion, contexts, and theoretical underpinnings and methodologies, which leads to thin coverage in some cases; some specific issues may be addressed by just a single paper.[16] In turn, this means that it is difficult to make judgements about the strength and consistency of evidence on some issues.

4.3.3 Norm carriers

Volume of evidence

There is extensive evidence about the role of international organisations in promoting international norms for gender equality (60 papers). The international community has developed an array of conventions, laws, and agreements that underpin formal gender rights globally, including CEDAW (1979), the UN's Beijing Platform for Action (2015), Women, Peace and Security (WPS) (2000), the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (2011) (the 'Istanbul Convention'), and various ILO International Labour Standards Conventions. Other frequently-studied norm carriers were national and local governments (45 papers), civil society (43 papers), and activists/spokespersons (24 papers).

There is also a large body of evidence exploring the roles of national and local governments and civil society in translating, moderating, and contesting international norms and commitments relating to domestic legislation, suggesting that they are also significant norm carriers.

[15] PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) is a standard for reporting in systematic reviews and meta-analyses (http://prisma-statement.org).

[16] For example, single papers coded under 'gender and political participation' in this REA cover a range of issues including: creating an administrative unit on gender equality; women's cabinet representation versus women's legislative representation; how violence against women politicians shapes their participation; how dictatorships use selective compliance with international gender norms to adapt to international pressure; and the causal pathways of quota adoption.

Table 6: Number of studies related to norm carriers for the gender theme

Norm carriers and consensus mechanisms	Gender & civil rights	Gender & political participation	Gender & employment rights
International organisations	30	28	18
National and local government	15	17	18
Private sector	0	1	1
Civil society	19	24	15
Media	2	0	2
Activists/spokespersons	13	14	8
Household/community	7	0	2

Findings

There is broad consensus in the literature that norm carriers do not work in isolation but operate within complex networks of actors. For example, Kim (2020, p. 462) explores how the world polity works via CEDAW in tandem with another key norm carrier – women's international NGOs (WINGOS) – to facilitate norm diffusion in their 'two overlapping but distinct arenas: the intergovernmental world polity and the nongovernmental world society'. CEDAW works by articulating the agenda, with states then held accountable to legislate and deliver on gender equality commitments (Kim, 2020). Meanwhile, WINGOS encourage citizen activism, connect women to activist groups, and raise awareness around women's rights (Kim, 2020). They operate at the attitudinal level (Kim, 2020). Kim (2020) finds that both these processes are strengthened when there are also nationally mandated legislative gender quotas and when WINGOs have strong international ties. Tabak et al. (2022) also explore this issue, highlighting how 'multiple agents participate in the local reception of global norms, and they generate plural responses, with each response utilizing the in-coming norm in their own defense of or challenge towards the already existing normative status quo'. Similarly, in relation to gender and work, the UN, International Labour Organization, and World Bank work with non-profit organisations, governments, the private sector, and civil society to support policies and laws to help women in the workplace, and promote evidence-based programmes, policies and laws. For example, a study finds that international incentives have been important in the adoption of gender quotas in the workplace, and that local NGOs and activists draw on research and narratives from international organisations to frame and support their work (Anderson, 2010). Anderson (2010) also notes that 'the diffusion of norms and practices also occurs from South to North and South to South'.

International institutions can often provide the framing for an issue, or a site for discussion, but are less prevalent as actors enforcing normative change, and are even less often able to demonstrate unambiguously positive outcomes. As Yüksel et al. (2017) note in their study of Türkiye, 'while there is no linear and direct diffusion of gender norms from the global/national to the local, we nevertheless observe significant global/local interplays to which these local norm transformations relate'.

4.3.4 Outcomes

Volume of evidence

There is extensive evidence about outcomes that have been achieved in implementing gender equality norms. Domestic formal commitments (50 papers), international led/funded programmes (36 papers), and international formal commitments (35 papers) are all well-studied. There is a particularly large body of evidence focusing on CEDAW, which is mentioned in almost all of the papers related to gender quality that were identified in this REA. CEDAW is an international legal instrument, exclusively devoted to gender equality, that requires countries to eliminate discrimination against

women and girls in all areas, and promotes their equal rights. It is almost universally ratified, but its level of implementation and impact on gender inequality vary significantly from country to country.

Table 7: Number of studies related to outcomes for the gender theme

Outcomes	Gender & civil rights	Gender & political participation	Gender & employment rights
International formal commitments	14	22	10
International led/funded programmes	15	21	12
Domestic formal commitments	21	25	18
Domestic led/funded programmes	11	12	11
Mobilisation/advocacy	10	11	4
Attitude/behaviour change	7	3	3
Unclear	5	0	1
Mixed	9	1	1

Findings

There is strong evidence that gender equality norms are being internalised, as demonstrated by the implementation of gender quotas and increases in women's representation (see, for example, Huang, 2015). In summarising the vast and rich literature on quota uptake, Swiss and Fallon (2017) identify common mechanisms leading to quota adoption including: the benefits gained by political elites or parties choosing to adopt quotas; the success of transnational and local women's activism; the diffusion of quotas within regions; and global pressures to adhere to world polity or regional expectations, in some cases to ensure continued access to donor funding. They find that quota adoption is particularly salient in post-conflict situations (Swiss & Fallon, 2017). Swiss and Fallon (2017) also find that 'regardless of the type of quota adopted, studies consistently find that women's activism contributes to the process'. Beyond high level findings on quotas, and within the time constraints of this REA, it is not possible to make statements on common findings by using the language relating to the strength of evidence, as a wide variety of subjects are covered often just by a single paper. And as Krook (2006) highlights, gender quotas have emerged across the world due to multiple processes and there is a need to 'move away from simple accounts of diffusion' to understand this. However, despite these positive indications, there is also widespread acknowledgement of gaps between international and national formal commitments, and between national commitments, implementation, and practical gender equality outcomes for women and girls.

Gender equality rules and norms are shaped through processes of localisation and have been subject to vigorous contestation and rivalry among social and political groups. For example, Tabak et al. (2022) explore the contested nature of global norm diffusion through an analysis of 'intra-group rivalries and fragmentations shaping local responses (often reactionary and resistant) to global norms… [specifically] global gender equality norms in Turkey by the conservative normative bloc'. Their article finds that the conservative bloc has two competing receptions of the norm, demonstrating this through emphasis of Türkiye's trajectory in first initiating and later withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention (Tabak et al., 2022). It shows how the 'institutionalized conservative response to gender equality has shifted from a compromising acceptance to a rejection over time' (Tabak et al., 2022). This paper highlights the complexities of determining what constitutes a 'successful' approach or outcome. Normative change is not linear, and outcomes are not binary. For example, even if a law is passed, it may not be implemented or it might be repealed. The paper by Tabak et al. (2022) emphasises the 'contested nature of the process of compliance and the prominence of rival entrepreneurial endeavors for resolving or maintaining the contestation'.

4.3.5 Enforcement and incentive mechanisms

Volume of evidence

There is limited evidence available about the role of enforcement and incentive mechanisms for promoting gender equality norms.[17] The literature identified in this area almost exclusively addresses donor funding or membership of organisations.

Table 8: Number of studies related to enforcement and incentive mechanisms for the gender theme

Enforcement and incentive mechanisms	Gender & civil rights	Gender & political participation	Gender & employment rights
Donor funding	6	6	0
Membership	3	3	3
Negative press	1	0	0
Sanctions	0	0	0
Other	1	0	0

Findings

International funding has improved a varied range of gender equality outcomes (five papers). Examples include: improvements in gender-related legislation (Donno et al., 2022); increases in women's share of cabinet seats (Kroeger & Kang, 2022); the adoption of gender quotas (due to post-conflict peace operations and dependence on foreign aid) (Bush, 2011); norm diffusion to individuals in recipient countries when the norms were integrated into aid projects (~~Zhang~~ & Huang, 2023); and that more gender-inclusive civil war peace agreements lay the foundations for international and domestic actors to strengthen women's rights after civil war (Reid, 2021).

However, integrating international norms into local contexts is complex and can raise dilemmas (four papers). Examples include: the gap between global norms and local realities (Horst, 2017); the adoption of gender quotas and reforms being more of a signalling device by autocracies rather than the result of liberalisation (Edgell, 2017); reservations over donor credibility and commitment to women's rights when security and ideological concerns are heightened (Robinson, 2013); the North-centric approach to assigning and managing priorities risks a disproportionate focus on short-term results while neglecting long-term goals (Walsh, 2016); and the tensions of competing views of cultural relativism and the universality of women's human rights in the Arab-Islamic world (Strzelecka, 2020).

Donor countries' priorities and domestic politics influence the policies that they pursue and promote. For example, Zhukovar et al. (2021) find that states 'translate international norms to their own advantage by producing strategic narratives to advance their soft power ambitions abroad'. Their paper explores how domestic politics and ideologies determine the form of gender equality promoted internationally; for example, 'Sweden and Mexico give more priority to social policies, while France and Canada emphasize the role of the market in addressing gender inequality' (Zhukovar et al., 2021). This echoes the findings of another paper that focuses on donor country politics and priorities: Woo and Parke (2022) find that aid from countries with more equal women's rights has a stronger positive effect on gender equality than aid from countries with less equal women's rights.

Autocracies may be receptive to adopting gender equality norms as part of selective compliance with international pressures or to improve their standing in the international community. For example, Donno et al. (2022) identify that dependence on foreign aid and shaming by international NGOs has been associated with legal advances in women's rights in autocracies where other

[17] However, this literature is more focused, and thus it is easier to analyse and to draw out common findings. Notably, more papers could be found by using focused searches on each sub-issue – for example, gender and civil right + norm diffusion + donor funding would uncover more papers that focus on this specific aspect.

democratic reforms may be more contentious to implement (such as reforms relating to elections). In this way, dictatorships use 'selective compliance with international gender norms to adapt to international pressure', revealing the role that international incentives can play as a complement to domestic 'bottom-up' pressure for women's rights in dictatorships (Donno et al., 2022). However, this also highlights the risk that international norms can be used as window-dressing to improve the reputation of dictatorships internationally.

Case study 2: Gender norms in Costa Rica and Malawi

Gender (in)equality in Costa Rica and Malawi: This section provides further insights into how international gender norms play out in practice by taking a deeper look at two countries at different ends of the norm adoption spectrum: Costa Rica and Malawi. It does so by narrowing down the broader focus set out in the REA to concentrate on two specific norms: civil rights and the legal status of women, and gender equality in political participation. Despite having roughly similar economic challenges in the 1960s, with comparable GDP per capita (US$300 in Costa Rica, £200 in Malawi) (World Bank, 2023), and being governed by conservative administrations in the 1960s and 1970s, Costa Rica is now a world leader when it comes to gender equality, while Malawi is one of the worst performing states in the world. The contrast between the two cases therefore has much to tell us about when international norms do and do not become domesticated, internalised and routinised. Most notably, Costa Rica features a more effective civil society, a less challenging set of social norms, and a more facilitative set of political institutions than Malawi, and it is these domestic factors that have combined to drive greater progress towards gender equality, despite the fact both countries faced similar international pressures.

In both cases, international gender norms have been conveyed and promoted through CEDAW and other agreements, which are highlighted as one of the main norm pathways in the REA, as well as the SGDS. SDG 5, for example, is gender equality, and includes indicators such as ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere and ensuring full participation of women in leadership and decision-making. In addition to these global standards and aspirations, the specific policies and campaigns of many donor countries also demonstrate a commitment to gender norms. For example, organisations such as the UK's Department for International Development made 'mainstreaming gender' a priority, and actively sought to promote gender equality across a wide range of spaces including education and political representation (Watkins, 2004). Similarly, the official policy of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) 'affirms that gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment are fundamental for the realization of human rights and key to effective and sustainable development outcomes' (USAID, 2023). However, in the case of Costa Rica and Malawi, it was Costa Rica, where international pressure was arguably weaker due to its stronger economic performance, that has made greater progress towards equal political representation. In turn, this highlights the extent to which domestic considerations often outweigh international factors when it comes to the extent or lack of internalisation.

Costa Rica's progress on these measures can be seen in the high number of women in parliament, and the fact that discrimination on the basis of gender is illegal. Costa Rica signed the CEDAW Convention in 1980 and ratified it in 1986, while the optional additional protocol was accepted in 2001. Just as importantly, the government has taken the implementation of these goals seriously, creating first a National Centre for Women and Family Development and then in 1998 the National Institute for Women (INAMU) 'as the supervisory body for national policies relating to women' (United Nations, 2003). The country also introduced a gender quota in 1996, and largely as a result (Tripp & Kang, 2008), it now has the eighth highest proportion of women in its legislature of any country in the world, at 47% (Jones, 2004). One factor that has facilitated this progress is that Costa Rica has generally been one of the most democratic states in Latin America, and is rated as being 'free' by Freedom House,

which notes that the country has experienced a 'long history of democratic stability' (Freedom House, 2023). In turn, this has facilitated a focus on providing equal rights in a range of different areas – as opposed to authoritarian states that have done well when it comes to the promotion of women's political representation, such as Rwanda, where a high number of women in parliament has not always translated into substantive change on what are often thought of as key women's issues (Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2022). Another related factor is Costa Rica's strong development performance over the last fifty years; this has reduced the tendency in many countries for men to claim they should have priority in the competition for scarce jobs (Oxford Analytica, 2023).

The combined effect of these developments on legal and political gender equality has been profound. Overall, UN Women finds that '83.3% of legal frameworks that promote, enforce and monitor gender equality under the SDG indicator, with a focus on violence against women, are in place' – the same percentage as the UK. Partly as a result, Costa Rica scores just 11 on the 0-100 Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), where higher scores reflect more discrimination – lower than the OECD average. This does not mean the country has achieved gender equality, of course (Hinojosa et al., 2022; Del Campo, 2005). Costa Rica has a significant gender pay gap (12%), while 500 girls under 15 become pregnant every year, and gender-based violence remains a serious concern (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2017). But the government continues to innovate legislation and policy in order to meet these challenges, and setbacks such as evidence of growing economic inequality between men and women are often the springboard for further government action. Good examples of this over the last thirty years include the passing of an Act Promoting the Social Equality of Women in 1990, the appointment of a Minister on the Status of Women, and then, in 2001, the introduction of the Responsible Paternity Act to 'prevent discrimination against women with children born out of wedlock or not recognized by the father'.

The situation in Malawi is markedly different. While Malawi ratified CEDAW in 1987, it has not yet ratified the Optional Protocol, despite signing it in 2000. Moreover, although a number of laws, policies and international treaties commit the country to advancing gender equality, in 2022 the World Bank's Malawi Gender Assessment and Gender-Based Violence Assessment found that a 'low and fragmented allocation of resources to support implementation of existing laws, policies, and programs, continues to constrain efforts to close the remaining gender gaps and prevent GBV' (World Bank, 2022). In other words, while the country has domesticated some international gender norms, it has neither internalised nor routinised them (Kayuni & Chikadza, 2016).

Progress has also been disappointing where political representation is concerned, despite the fact that the country became one of the first in Africa to feature a female president during Joyce Banda's brief tenure (2012-14) (Mbilizi, 2013). In part due to the patriarchal approach of Malawi's first president, Hastings Banda, women's political roles have often been confined to dancing and organising entertainment for political rallies, rather than leadership (Mwanjawala, 2020). Against this background, and in the absence of a gender quota, Malawi sits 109th in the ranking of countries by female representation, with women making up just 20% of the legislature. Taken together, the marginalisation of women's voices within politics and the lack of investment in ensuring that legal equality is respected in reality, mean that women are not treated equally under the law. Perhaps most notably, the police have regularly been found to have failed in their duty to prosecute sexual abuse and rape (Pensulo, 2020). In turn, this has a serious impact on the everyday lives of women and girls. Rates of child marriage are alarming, with 42% of girls married before they are 18, while the proportion of women that have suffered gender-based violence remains high, at 34% (Pensulo, 2020). Partly as a result, Malawi scores much higher than Costa Rica on the SIGI of gender discrimination, at 32.9 – above the world average of 29.9.

Explaining norm internalisation: The difference in norm adoption between Costa Rica and Malawi cannot be explained on the basis of international norm carriers and pathways. The key international

treaties and conventions that acted as pathways of norms are the same in both cases. The two countries also feature similar contexts when it comes to norm enforcement. Although Costa Rica sits in a region that generally sees higher levels of gender equality than sub-Saharan Africa, and so could be said to have stronger pressures in terms of maintaining its regional reputation, nearby states such as Honduras and Nicaragua perform much worse where gender equality is concerned. In other words, Costa Rica is a regional leader, not a laggard being pulled up as a result of pressure from nearby states.

Moreover, there was, if anything, stronger international pressure on Malawi than Costa Rica to enact reforms. While Costa Rica received US$1.7 billion in direct bilateral aid between 1946 and 1995 from the United States for example, its comparatively strong economy means that it has not been as dependent on aid as Malawi. Moreover, James Fox's review of US support suggests that at least until the early 1990s the aid to Costa Rica did not contain a strong focus on gender, perhaps in part because the government had already begun enacting reforms in this area (Fox, 1996). By comparison, Malawi has faced strong international and regional pressure to make greater progress on norm adoption in this area. For the last twenty years, Malawi has relied heavily on foreign aid, which has comprised as much as 40% of the government budget (World Bank, 2023). In turn, this gave international donors that prioritised gender norms considerable leverage. DFID, for example, invested heavily in programmes designed to end violence against women and girls, improve access to education for women, and empower more women to secure political office. Over the same time period, numerous reports from Western donors and the United Nations exhorted the Malawian government to prioritise closing the economic and political gap between men and women. Malawi also sits in a region of Africa – Southern Africa – and is a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which has formally agreed a target of ensuring that at least one-third of the legislature should be women. (Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019). Today, Malawi is one of the only countries in the region to have failed to meet this target, trailing well behind countries such as Angola, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa. Given Malawi's aid dependency and regional location, we might have expected higher levels of norm internalisation than has been the case.

In other words, the strength of international norm pathways and carriers can neither explain limited norm adoption in Malawi, nor the impressive norm internalisation in Costa Rica. Instead, this variation is best accounted for by the different domestic contexts in these countries. More specifically, Costa Rica features a less challenging set of social norms and more effective civil society, which along with more facilitative electoral institutions has both encouraged and demanded stronger political leadership on gender issues.

- **Existing norms and practices**. The combination of limited education for girls and the powerful hold of traditional leaders ('chiefs') has sustained problematic gender norms in Malawi. Among other things, cultural practices, especially in rural areas, legitimise child marriage, value the education of boys ahead of that of girls, and facilitate male domination of household decision-making. Consequently, women face considerable barriers to economic and social equality, which makes it even harder for them to secure equality in the political arena. The situation is significantly different in Costa Rica, where patriarchal values were less deeply entrenched and the constitution recognised legal equality before the law as early as 1949, in part because of the activity of a vibrant suffragist movement (Sharratt, 1997). As a result, implementing international gender norms has faced less societal resistance in Costa Rica than in Malawi, and so norm internalisation has been both quicker and more comprehensive.
- **Strength of civil society**. A number of organisations have campaigned against practices such as child marriage, and in favour of gender quotas, in Malawi, but they tend to have less traction than their counterparts in Costa Rica. In the latter case, bodies such as the aforementioned INAMU and the Vital Voices organisation have played an important role in advocating for norms around gender equality to be implemented. These organisations tend to be reasonably well funded, through a combination of government funds, donor support,

and domestic fundraising. While Vital Voices supports the 'economic empowerment of women leaders by financially supporting their businesses, social enterprises and non-profit organisations' (Calugara, 2020), INAMU works with the government and facilitates training and access to resources. Similar organisations exist in Malawi, such as the NGO Gender Coordination Network – which includes international NGOs such as Oxfam – but they tend to have fewer resources and to be less well connected to the government. Partly as a result, such civil society groups often have limited structures outside urban areas, and weak influence over government policy. Moreover, although the Malawi Women's Caucus (the group of women MPs elected to the legislature) has attempted to amplify some of these concerns within the National Assembly (Malawi Women's Caucus, 2023), the small number of women MPs means that they can only pass progressive reform by persuading large numbers of male MPs to act as 'allies'. Taken together, these differences between the two countries mean that key players such as male political leaders have faced stronger and more effective pressure to pursue the internalisation and domestication of international gender norms in Costa Rica.

- **Facilitative political institutions**. A number of studies have found that gender equality in political representation is most likely to occur when a legislative quota is introduced. In turn, quotas are generally easier to implement when the legislature is elected using a system of proportional representation, than when countries use the first-past-the-post (FPTP) model of constituency elections as in the UK. This is because candidate selection in FPTP systems is often devolved to local constituency party branches, which makes it far harder to coordinate the selection of candidates to ensure that a higher number of women are actually elected (Tripp & Kang, 2008). Having been a former British colony, Malawi features a FPTP Westminster-style legislature. Along with the reluctance of senior male political leaders to change the political system to accommodate more women, this has complicated the process of introducing a quota, despite current President Lazarus Chakwera's rhetorical support for the idea. By contrast, Costa Rica employs a system of proportional representation with multi-member constituencies. It therefore faced fewer institutional barriers to the introduction of a quota. In turn, the growing number of women in parliament enabled female MPs, civil society groups and male allies to join forces in order to push for further norm domestication and routinisation. In 2002, for example, the government enacted the Law to Prevent, Address, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women in Politics (Adamson et al., 2020), one of the first pieces of legislation worldwide specifically designed to eradicate violence against women and girls (VAWG) in the political arena.

The combination of these factors means that the government of Costa Rica has experienced an effective combination of 'carrots and sticks' that have motivated it to overcome implementation challenges and enact reforms to promote gender equality. This has been important, because in some areas Costa Rica's gains have been won through a process of trial and error. The legislative gender quota is a good example of this. Having initially required parties to ensure that 40% of candidates were women, new rules were introduced when it became clear that women were not always being selected to compete for seats they had a good chance of winning. In 1999, for example, a new provision was made to force parties to include women in electable spots on party lists. Then, in 2009, a further amendment required parties to ensure 50% representation of women among a party's candidates. This iterative reform process, combined with the hard work of civil society groups and women's leaders, is why Costa Rica now features one of the highest proportions of women MPs in the world. While Costa Rica has yet to achieve true equality when it comes to women's rights (Biroli & Caminotti, 2020), and a number of challenges remain, the extent of progress is striking when compared with laggards in this area such as Malawi.

Beyond Malawi and Costa Rica, it is also important to note that the power of global norms such as gender equality sometimes means that they are appropriated by authoritarian governments looking

to improve their image. When this happens, as in countries such as Cuba and Rwanda – a highly authoritarian state that in 2023 currently featured the highest proportion of women in the legislature of any country in the world – it can be very hard to work out whether government support for women's representation is motivated by a genuine concern for equality, or is a carefully calculated attempt to improve the government's global reputation. Research on this issue suggests that even in highly constrained political systems the inclusion of more women in the legislature can generate positive results (Burnet 2011) – such as higher government spending on healthcare – but also that it is important to not mistake the introduction of gender quotas in these cases as implying a deeper concern for political rights and civil liberties (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2022).

This brief review of the adoption of international gender norms thus provides further evidence of three interrelated points that are in line with the REA:

1. **Domestic factors are critical in shaping norm adoption and are often more significant than the mode/type of norm carrier**. The critical drivers and barriers to the genuine adoption of international gender norms in Costa Rica and Malawi were predominantly domestic factors: the challenges posed by existing gender norms, the strength of civil society, and the institutional context. This is an important reminder that while there is much that international actors can do to promote norms on issues such as gender more effectively, even the best laid plans are likely to have limited impact in countries where the domestic context is particularly inhospitable.
2. **Effective political leadership on norm internalisation is often driven by civil society groups and women leaders**. It is easy to think that the adoption of norms simply depends on the presence of 'good leadership', but the real question we need to ask is where good leadership on issues such as gender equality comes from. In countries such as Costa Rica, male MPs and presidents have not simply domesticated international gender norms because they were better leaders, but because they have been consistently pushed in this direction by influential civil society groups and women leaders.
3. **The domestic context is not fixed**. The pre-eminence of the domestic context in shaping norm adoption does not mean that international actors such as the UK are powerless to encourage domestication. Rather, it points to the need to view norm internalisation as a long-term process that must include a strong focus on building a powerful domestic constituency for reform. The domestic context in Costa Rica and Malawi is not fixed, rather it has constantly evolved, albeit to different extents. Strengthening civil society groups and providing expertise and assistance to help countries overcome institutional and logistical barriers to reform are just two ways that international actors can help to foster a domestic landscape that is more favourable to norm internalisation.

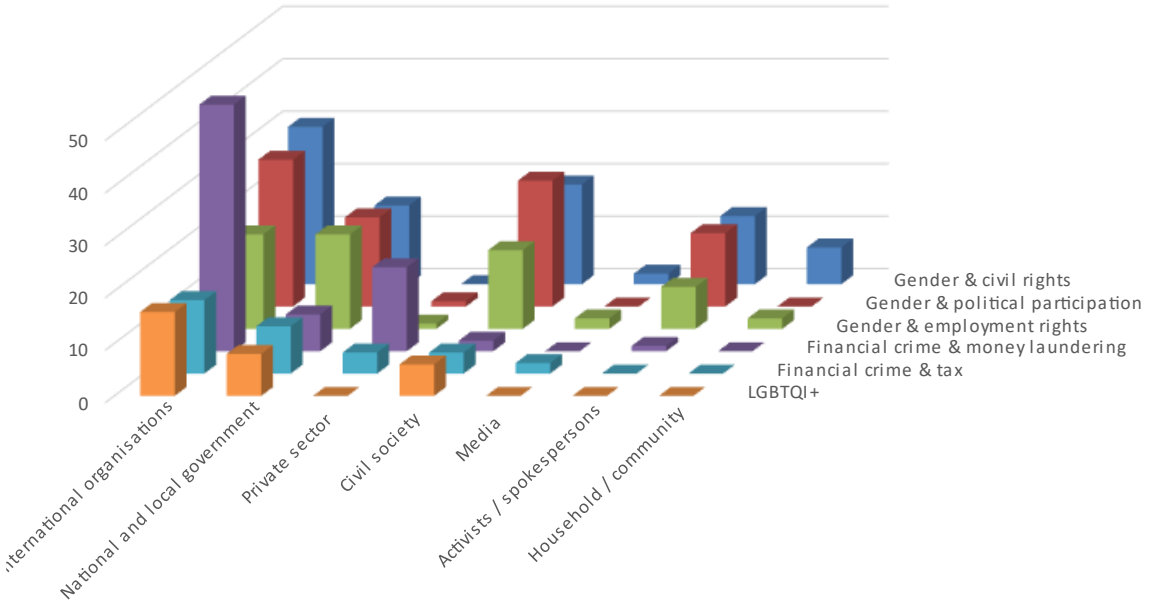
5. Conclusion

Norms are diffused to and applied in LICs and MICs in complex, multifaceted, non-linear, and context-specific processes. When considered alongside the fact that formal policy commitments do not always lead to change on the ground, this points to the need for combined approaches, working through diverse norm carriers and using a range of diffusion and enforcement and incentive mechanisms. An approach that is effective in one country, or in relation to a particular norm, might be completely ineffective in a different context. A multi-pronged approach is far more likely to achieve the end goal of norm internalisation than single-route, single-carrier approaches. This point is especially relevant to the REA sub-questions about which norm transmission pathways can be impactful, what conditions are needed, and which factors will make this more likely. The answer emerging from the REA is that there is no single definitive pathway, or set of factors or conditions. Norm diffusion, adoption and internalisation are complex and a range of approaches could work.

5.1. Norm carriers

There is a large body of evidence examining norm carriers (172 papers) across the three themes examined in this review, most of which relates to the role played by international organisations. National and local governments, civil society, other activists, and households and communities are also commonly studied in relation to gender equality norms. The private sector (specifically the banking sector) is studied almost exclusively in relation to financial crime (particularly money laundering). There is very little evidence available about other norm carriers.

Figure 8: Number of papers discussing each norm carrier and sub-theme



Across all three main themes, the literature consistently indicates that **norm carriers rarely work alone, but are more likely to be effective when working in collaborative networks, especially with national level actors**. International actors have a significant role to play in framing and promoting norms, and in convening discussions, but they must inevitably cooperate with and support a range of national actors to achieve impacts within countries. Positive impacts have been seen when international organisations collaborate with and support local, national, or regional actors. In the case of LGBT+ rights and gender equality, there is consensus that local actors should be 'in the driving seat' rather than being seen to be implementers of an externally-imposed agenda.

Findings identified in the literature related to the three themes examined in the review are:

LGBT+ rights

- Transnational advocacy, whereby there are links between international/regional CSOs and those operating at national/local levels, has a positive but small impact in promoting norms for LGBT+ rights.
- There is insufficient evidence on the role of development cooperation in promoting norms for LGBT+ rights to reach well-supported conclusions.
- There is limited evidence that international development agencies are more effective in promoting international norms for LGBT+ rights when they work through local partners, use long-term and flexible funding arrangements, and have inclusive recruitment practices.
- Support for local actors and advocacy organisations is critical, but local organisations should be 'in the driving seat' in advocating for LGBT+ norms, rather than being seen to be implementers of an external agenda.

Preventing financial crime

- The transnational literature is very positive about the impact of international organisations in diffusing norms on tax and financial crime, and in particular on money laundering.
- Although the OECD is the main convenor of 'whole of government' approaches to fighting tax and financial crime, there is insufficient evidence to determine how successful its efforts have been.
- There is limited evidence that peer-to-peer assessments and mutual accountability frameworks used by the OECD and the FATF to monitor and assess compliance with standards have had positive effects.
- National legislation acts as a carrier of norms for preventing money laundering and on 'whole of government' approaches to fighting tax and financial crime.
- Private sector organisations, notably banks, can play an important role in curbing illicit financial flows, but may be less involved in preventing tax crimes.

Gender equality

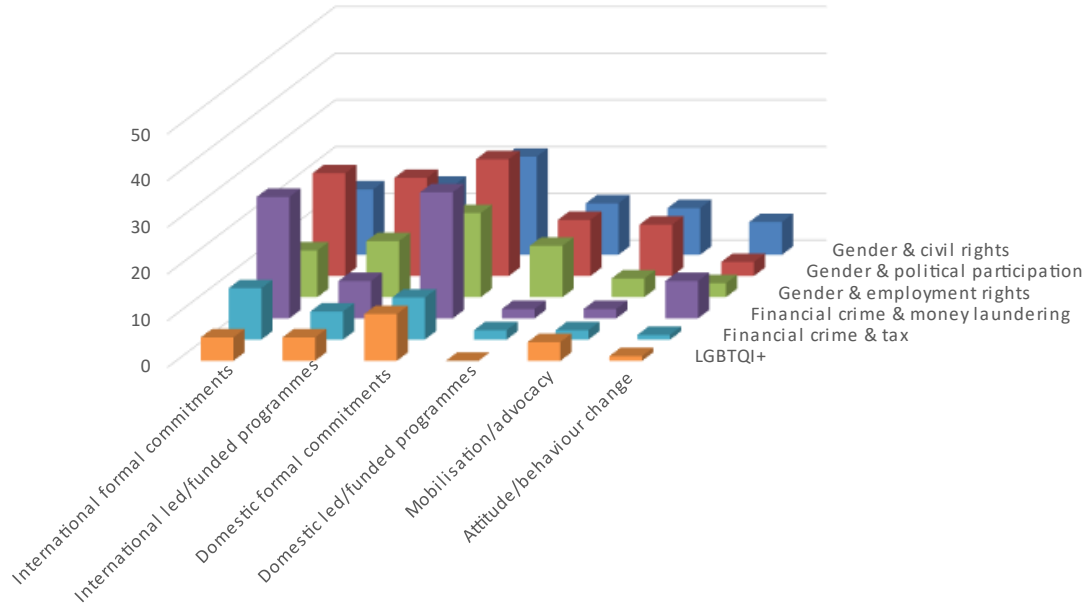
- There is broad consensus in the literature that norm carriers do not work in isolation but operate within complex networks of actors.
- International institutions can often provide the framing for an issue, or a site for discussion, but are less prevalent as actors enforcing normative change, and are even less often able to demonstrate unambiguously positive outcomes.
- Domestic factors are critical in shaping norm adoption and are often more significant than the mode/type of norm carrier.
- Effective political leadership on norm internalisation is often driven by civil society groups and women leaders.
- Norm internalisation is a long-term process that must include a strong focus on building a powerful domestic constituency for reform.

5.2. Outcomes

There is a large body of evidence (166 papers) about intermediate outcomes achieved in implementing international norms, but the availability of evidence varies significantly across the three themes studied in this review. Formal or official commitments and programmes are generally well studied, and a large quantity of evidence is available about international formal commitments, international programmes, and domestic formal commitments in the themes of gender equality and preventing financial crime (but not LGBT+ rights). There is also a significant body of evidence about all types of

outcomes in relation to gender equality. Only very limited evidence is available about domestic programmes, mobilisation and advocacy, and attitude and behaviour change in relation to financial crime and LGBT+ rights.

Figure 9: Number of papers discussing each outcome and sub-theme



Internalising norms is a difficult and contested process; formal commitments by themselves are not sufficient to achieve action 'on the ground', and internalising norms often requires broad social change. Norm adoption is complex, contested, context-specific, and in some cases depends on technical capacity. The process of transmitting national legislation and commitments to the local level can be mediated (and distorted) by local social and cultural factors, lack of capacity, and other constraints. This suggests that formal commitments, while often a significant achievement, should not be seen as evidence of norm adoption, but rather as a stepping stone towards it. There is good evidence that norms around gender equality are being internalised (as demonstrated not only by the adoption of international formal commitments, but also by the implementation of gender quotas and increased representation of women in decision-making bodies), but international norms relating to financial crime and LGBT+ rights appear to have been more weakly adopted.

Adopting national legislation guaranteeing rights or making formal international commitments does not necessarily equate to positive societal outcomes, that is, tangible changes in behaviour and attitudes on the ground. As seen with gender equality norms, the process of transmitting national legislation/commitments to the local level can be mediated (and/or distorted) by complex factors including local social and cultural attitudes. In other cases (as with preventing financial crime), lack of capacity or other constraints can undermine implementation. Internalising norms is a complex social process, and formal commitments, while often a significant achievement, should not be seen as evidence of norm adoption but rather as a stepping stone towards norm adoption. Donors should consider what further support could be provided to translate policy commitments into change on the ground.

Additional findings identified in the literature related to the three themes examined in the review are:

LGBT+ rights

- International diplomacy, conventions, and formal mandates have played a role in promoting international norms for LGBT+ rights although the evidence in this area is limited.

- The European Union has made more progress than the United Nations in advocating LGBT+ rights norms.

Preventing financial crime

- Scholars based in low- and middle-income countries tend to be pessimistic about the extent to which norms can be meaningfully implemented.
- Some middle-income countries, such as China and Vietnam, find it useful to comply with FATF recommendations and participate in these international organisations to influence policy.

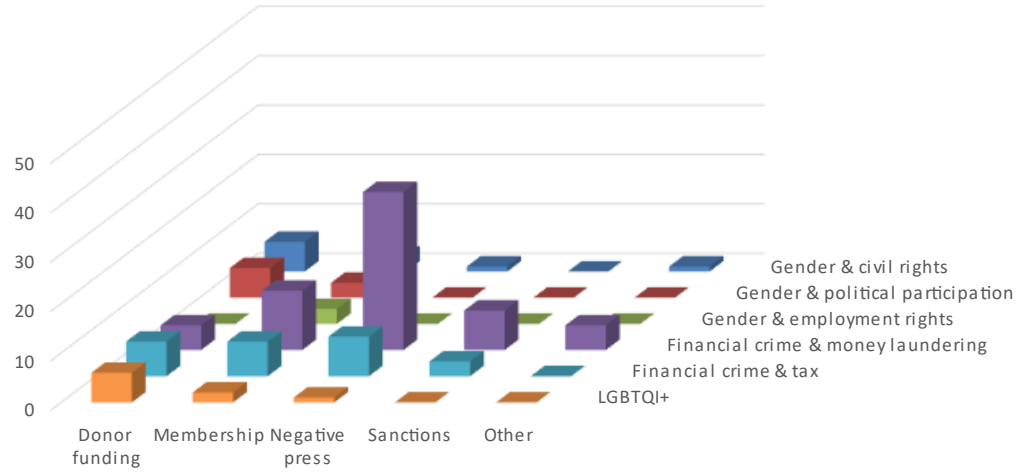
Gender equality

- There is strong evidence that gender equality norms are being internalised, as demonstrated by the implementation of gender quotas and increases in women's representation.
- Gender equality rules and norms are shaped through processes of localisation and have been subject to vigorous contestation and rivalry among social and political groups.

5.3. Enforcement and incentive mechanisms

There is a significant amount of evidence (79 papers) available about enforcement and incentive mechanisms in relation to preventing financial crime, most notably about the role of negative publicity in the form of official 'naming and shaming' in enforcing norms for preventing money laundering. There is very little evidence published about these mechanisms in relation to norms around the other two main themes studied in this review, LGBT+ rights and gender equality.

Figure 10: Number of papers discussing each enforcement and incentive mechanism and sub-theme



Across all three themes, there are clear messages in the literature that **internalising norms is a complex social process, and enforcement and incentive mechanisms may not be able to contribute strongly to internalising norms about socially and culturally sensitive issues**. However, it is also clear (albeit with a limited quantity of evidence) that enforcement and incentive mechanisms have contributed to internalising some types of norms. In gender equality and preventing financial crime, donor funding and 'naming and shaming' have been shown to be effective. However, enforcement and incentive mechanisms do not appear to have been effective in promoting norms for LGBT+ rights.

Findings identified in the literature related to the three themes examined in the review are:

LGBT+ rights

- There is very little evidence available about enforcement and incentive mechanisms for LGBT+ norms, probably because internalising these norms requires deeper social change than can be achieved through these mechanisms.
- There is clear but limited evidence that aid conditionality does not work, and could have very negative effects, including on LGBT+ people.
- Public criticism by international actors, and aid suspensions (whether threatened or actual) are ineffective norm promotion or enforcement and incentive mechanisms, and can backfire.

Preventing financial crime

- The naming and shaming element of the FATF lists (of high-risk countries and countries being monitored) is a key enforcer of international norms for preventing money laundering.

Gender equality

- International funding has improved a varied range of gender equality outcomes.
- Integrating international norms into local contexts is complex and can raise dilemmas.
- Donor countries' priorities and domestic politics influence the policies that they pursue and promote.
- Autocracies may be receptive to adopting gender equality norms as part of selective compliance with international pressures or to improve their standing in the international community.

5.5. Evidence gaps

One of the primary functions of a rapid evidence assessment is to identify gaps in the literature – issues which have not been well-researched and where the quantity or quality of evidence is limited or weak, for whatever reasons. The volume of evidence on a subject does not necessarily indicate the importance of the issue for any particular purpose, but may be influenced by factors such as research funding priorities, feasibility of research on the topic, and methodological challenges. This project identified three areas where there appears to be a lack of evidence:

1. **Evidence about how global norms lead to changes in behaviour or outcomes:** While there are many examples of countries adopting global norms, it is difficult to attribute changes to the diffusion of these norms, as there are often many other factors at play.
2. **Evidence about the diffusion of norms related to LGBT+ rights:** This theme showed a dramatically smaller evidence base than the other two themes investigated in this review. This may be because these norms are at an early stage in their lifecycle.
3. **Context-specific evidence**: Global norms are often developed in specific contexts and may not be appropriate or effective in other contexts. For example, a norm promoting gender equality may be effective in one country but may not be so in a country with different cultural, social, and political contexts. Much of the literature identified in this review adopts a transnational approach; more evidence is required on the diffusion of norms to specific countries and local contexts.

5.6. Potential areas for further research

In the course of this rapid evidence assessment, five issues related to processes of norm diffusion which were outside the scope of the project became apparent as warranting further investigation:

1. **Resistance and backlash**: The diffusion of global norms can provoke resistance and backlash, particularly where they are perceived as being imposed by external actors and contrary to government policy or public opinion. This can lead to a further entrenchment of the status

quo, rather than promoting change. This issue was particularly noted while gathering evidence for the LGBT+ theme. More evidence is also required on the rollback of global norms, in other words, how these pathways can operate in reverse. This is particularly relevant in a context when the international order is increasingly fractured.

2. **Selectivity and power dynamics**: The diffusion of global norms is often selective, with certain norms being prioritised over others based on the power dynamics of the global system. This can lead to a lack of diversity in the types of norms that are promoted and can also exacerbate existing inequalities and power imbalances.
3. **Monitoring and accountability of norm diffusion**: There is often a lack of accountability and oversight in the diffusion of global norms, which can lead to unintended consequences and negative outcomes. Without clear mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the impact of these norms, it is difficult to assess their effectiveness and address any negative consequences.
4. **The potential for leveraging existing international conventions on one theme to promote international norms on other themes**: One paper (Holtmaat & Post, 2015) suggested that it might be possible to use CEDAW, the international convention on discrimination against women which has been almost universally ratified, to also support LGBT+ rights, but noted that this might entail a risk of significant backlash against LGBT+ people and women. Further investigation of how international conventions might be expanded or repurposed, and the risks associated with doing so, might be useful in relation to some types of norms.
5. **Success factors for individual agencies**: There is some limited evidence that some agencies and international bodies have been more successful than others in promoting international norms. For example, the Swedish agency, SIDA, has been described as a leader in pushing LGBT+ norms in development cooperation, and the European Union has been described as more successful than the United Nations in promoting LGBT+ rights (Nilsson et al., 2013; Swiebel, 2009). Further exploration of why some agencies are seen as more successful than others could be useful in informing strategy and policy for other agencies.

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Annex 1: Database and organisational searches

The academic databases listed below were selected for inclusion because they cover a range of disciplines relevant to the topic and are accessible via the University of Birmingham's institutional affiliations. They provide access to literature concerning international rules and norms as well as broader development-focused literature (including the mechanisms through which norms and rules are diffused). The list of databases and organisational websites was reviewed by experts within the field during preliminary stages of the research.

Table 9: Databases searched

Database	Description
Africabib	AfricaBib is a collection of Africana social science titles.
Bibliography of Asian Studies	*The Bibliography of Asian Studies* (BAS) provides bibliographical coverage of Western-language journal articles, review articles, conference proceedings and chapters in edited volumes that deal with East, Southeast and South Asia and with overseas Asian communities.
Google Scholar	Database of journal articles and grey literature (including expert studies), with a more restrictive search function.
International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)	Academic database of social science and interdisciplinary research (journal articles, books) with broad coverage of international material.
ProQuest Politics Collection	Collection of academic political science and public policy databases, including PAIS (articles, reports and statistical compilations about public policy, social policy and international development), Political Science Database (leading political science and international relations journals), and Worldwide Political Science Abstracts (journal articles relating to world politics, international relations, government, and public policy).
Scopus	Comprehensive database of global, interdisciplinary scientific data and literature across multiple research fields.
Web of Science	Comprehensive database of journal articles (including Science Citation Index, Social Sciences Citation Index, and Arts and Humanities Citation Index).
Worldwide Political Science Abstracts (WPSA)	Worldwide Political Science Abstracts (WPSA) provides citations, abstracts, and indexing of the international serials literature in political science and its complementary fields, including international relations, law, and public administration/policy.

To reduce biases associated with a focus on English language sources and the concentration on academic articles and studies, the research team also searched for literature published by organisations in low- and middle-income countries and regions, and consulted with subject experts to identify literature and sources that might be disadvantaged due to language, publication status or discoverability. This included searching the websites of leading research and international organisations focused on areas such as democracy and human rights, including organisations based in the 'Global South'. See Table 10 for a list and descriptions of organisational websites searched. The

selection is intended to cover both research-focused organisations as well as international or regional organisations (for example, development banks, UN agencies).

Table 10: Organisational websites searched

Organisation	Description
3ie Development Evidence Portal	Open-access repository of international development research (studies, impact evaluations, systematic reviews) on low- and middle-income countries, with an advanced search option.
African Development Bank Group	Repository of research, analysis, evaluation and other publications covering a range of development-related topics, searchable by sector, country and title keywords.
Asian Development Bank	Repository of research, analysis, evaluation and other publications covering a range of development-related topics, searchable by topic, country/region and document type.
Brookings	A US non-profit public policy organisation. Archive is searchable by key term. Publications on foreign policy, economics, development, governance and metropolitan policy.
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	Carnegie Endowment generates strategic ideas and independent analysis and supports diplomacy, searchable by key term.
Chatham House Online Archive	*Chatham House Online Archive* provides a searchable research database that enables users to explore close to 90 years of expert analysis and commentary on international policy.
Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa	African research organisation based in Senegal, with publications on a range of development issues (no specific search function).
Council on Foreign Relations	The Council on Foreign Relations is an American think tank specialising in US foreign policy and international relations. Searchable by key theme.
Eldis	Open-access database hosted by the Institute of Development Studies, sharing development research by a global network of research organisations, intended for development practitioners, decision makers and researchers. Basic keyword search function, searchable by country.
Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSDRC)	Partnership of research institutes, think tanks and consultancy organisations synthesising evidence on a range of development and humanitarian issues. Analysis and literature review reports searchable by country and theme.
Institute for Security Studies	African research organisation with offices in South Africa, Kenya, Ethiopia and Senegal, with publications searchable by region and topic.
Institute of Development Studies	UK-based research institute. Publications searchable by region and country, cluster and regional or topic-focused programmes/centres.
OECD publications database	Research and analysis publications, evaluation reports, working papers and data collection on development-related topics, searchable by theme and country.

Overseas Development Institute	Reports, research papers and briefings on development issues, searchable by country and topic.
Research for Development Outputs	UK government repository of research and evaluation reports covering a range of development-related topics, searchable by publication type, country of focus and theme.
South African Institute of International Affairs	South African think tank with research on a range of governance and development issues. Archive includes reports, policy briefs and other publications searchable by theme, region, and country.
UN University collection	Open-access database of publications by members of the UN University community, with an advanced search function.
Westminster Foundation for Democracy	UK-based think tank. Archive includes basic search function including publication type, theme, location.
World Bank Open Knowledge Repository	Repository of research, analysis, evaluation and other publications covering a range of development-related topics, searchable by topic and keyword.

Annex 2: Key words for database and web searches

Table 11: Keywords for database and web searches

Topic	Search terms
Rules and norms	International Rule* OR norm* OR law* OR convention* OR agreement* OR value* OR ideolo* OR belief* OR polic* OR programme* OR protocol OR learning OR media OR dialogue OR training OR colloquium OR resolution OR target OR indicators OR communi* OR "international organisation" OR "normative influence*" OR "norm all*" OR "norm implement*" OR "norm intertwining" OR "norm entrepreneur*" OR "norm cascade" OR "norm reproduction" OR "norm diffusion" OR "policy transfer"
Gender discrimination with civil and legal rights	gender equality OR women's rights OR gender AND "human rights" OR gender AND "legal rights" OR gender AND discrimination
Gender discrimination and political participation	"women's political participation" OR gender AND "political participation" OR gender AND "political representation" OR women AND "political representation" OR gender AND elections OR women AND elections
Gender discrimination and work	women* AND work OR gender AND work OR gender AND "labour rights" OR women AND "labour rights" OR gender AND employment OR women AND employment
LGBT+ rights	LGBT* OR lesbian OR gay OR bisexual OR transsexual OR trans OR queer OR intersex OR "non-binary" OR nonbinary OR "SOGI" OR SOGIESC[18] OR "sexual orientation" OR "gender identity" OR "sexual and gender minority" OR "men who have sex with men" OR homophobi* OR transphobi*
Preventing financial crime	FATF, money-laundering, fraud, bribery, grand corruption, kleptocracy, IFF, IAACA, OECD, IMF, World Bank, Transparency International

These search terms were used in various configurations depending on the database used, search options and limitations of each database. In most databases, the search encompassed article titles, abstracts, and metadata (keywords assigned by the database operator). For databases that allowed Boolean strings, the search strings included combinations of the following categories of keywords:

- example search strategy: (LGBT* OR lesbian OR gay OR SOGI OR transgender) AND (norms OR rules OR conventions) AND ("transnational advocacy" OR transmission OR introduction OR adoption OR action OR enforcement OR implementation)

For databases with restrictions on the number of characters used in searches, we used shorter search strings in multiple combinations.

For organisational websites where search functions were limited to basic keywords and with no focused search filters, site-focused Google searches were conducted using refined search strings:

[18] Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics (SOGIGESC).

- example search strategy for organisational websites: site:www.wfd.org (LGBT* OR lesbian OR gay OR SOGI OR transgender) AND (norms OR rules OR conventions) AND ("transnational advocacy" OR transmission OR introduction OR adoption OR action OR enforcement OR implementation

Multiple permutations of keywords were used in an attempt to capture material that may have been described in various ways in the various databases being searched. The study of rights and norms is a broad and interdisciplinary field, and there are many different perspectives and approaches that can be taken to understand this process. The absence of a consistent terminology across studies problematises efforts to assess the evidence base, with terms such as transmission, diffusion, translation, and transfer used interchangeably.

Annex 3: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Each study retrieved in the search process was reviewed against inclusion and exclusion criteria that were defined based on the Terms of Reference for this project and the research team's knowledge of the literature. For the gender theme, due to the large number of papers identified in the initial searches, selection was halted once 50 papers in succession (in the order that they were returned by the database being searched) were found to be not relevant. Other modifications to inclusion and exclusion criteria are noted in the thematic sections of this report.

Search results were identified for possible inclusion on the basis of metadata when available (such as publication date), titles, and abstracts (or executive summaries in the case of grey literature). The abstracts or summaries of these initially retained results were then subjected to a review against inclusion criteria. Full-text papers were then assessed for quality. All sources that met the inclusion criteria were coded and assessed for quality.

The results from database and publication searches have been recorded, including the number of sources returned and included/excluded at each stage. Potentially relevant studies were catalogued in a database developed for this project.

Table 12: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

	Studies to be included	Studies to be excluded
Year of publication	Since 2000	Prior to 2000[19]
Language	English	Any other language
Publication type	Academic journal articles, reports (grey literature)	Books and book chapters (excluded due to time constraints/access issues), unpublished papers and dissertations, student papers, blogs
Study type and approach	Any research using primary quantitative, qualitative or mixed research methods to examine how international rules and norms translate into action in low- and middle-income countries and lead to more open societies and stronger human rights outcomes	Purely theoretical and conceptual research on the impacts of rules and norms that does not include an analysis of how they lead to more open societies and stronger human rights outcomes in low- and middle-income countries
	Secondary reviews of research on how international rules and norms translate into action in low- and middle-income countries and lead to more open societies and stronger human rights	

[19] The selection of the year 2000 acknowledges the importance of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in framing discussions of development issues.

Thematic focus	Research which analyses the themes and specific norms which are the focus of this REA (see section 3.1)	Research which discusses norms not subject to review in this research
Study focus	Research which analyses pathways, processes or mechanisms through which international rules and norms translate into action in low- and middle-income countries and lead to more open societies and stronger human rights	Research which fails to analyse pathways through which international rules and norms translate into action in low- and middle-income countries and lead to more open societies and stronger human rights
	Organisational mechanisms for norm diffusion (such as UN, OECD)	Studies which, despite using keywords pertaining to international 'rules' and 'norms' and the areas covered by this REA include little or no analysis of links between them
	Research which describes how normative change happens with regard to the diffusion of norms or rules	Studies which exclusively analyse the process of agreeing rules and norms at the international level

Annex 4: Coding framework

Table 13: Coding framework for reviewed studies

Component	Description
Author(s)	Name(s)
Year of publication	Year
Research design	Experimental Quasi-experimental Observational
Research type[20]	Primary research study Secondary review study
Research method	Quantitative Qualitative Mixed methods Other (free text)
Publication form	Peer-reviewed journal Evaluation Expert report
Publisher	Academic organisation/think tank Multilateral, bilateral or intergovernmental organisation National/host government organisation Non-governmental organisation Private/commercial organisation
Quality appraisal score	High quality Moderate quality Low quality
Thematic focus	LGBT+ Preventing financial crime Gender and civil rights Gender and political participation Gender and employment rights
Geographic focus	Transnational, MENA, sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, South America, Latin America and the Caribbean, Oceania
Countries	FREE TEXT
Norm carriers and consensus mechanisms	International organisations National and local government Private sector Civil society Media

[20] When coding studies for research type and other components, we will refer to FCDO's research assessment framework and definitions for describing and categorising single studies (DFID, 2014, pp. 5-9).

	Activists/spokespersons Household/community Other (free text)
Outcome	International formal commitments International led/funded programmes Domestic formal commitments Domestic led/funded programmes Mobilisation/advocacy Attitude/behaviour change Unclear Mixed
Enforcement and incentive mechanisms	Donor funding Membership Negative press Sanctions Other

Annex 5: Assessing the quality of evidence

As per previous identified best practice REAs, the research team assessed the quality of individual studies based on rigour. This assessment framework draws on FCDO's quality assessment framework as well as frameworks adopted in previous REAs. Questions for rigour are derived from FCDO's research quality assessment framework and accompanying definitions, covering broad aspects of conceptual framing (question 1), transparency (question 2), appropriateness (question 3) and cogency (question 4) (DFID, 2014). The assessment of rigour was applied to all types of literature included in the review. Each study assessed was designated as either 'high', 'moderate' or 'low' quality.

Table 14: Quality appraisal framework for individual studies

Component	Assessment questions	Scoring
Rigour	. Conceptual framing: Is there a clear statement of the aims of the research/does the study present a specific research question? . Transparency: Does the study clearly identify and explain its research design and data collection methods? . Appropriateness: Are the methods appropriate? . Cogency: Are the conclusions clearly based on/substantiated by the study data and findings?	Score one point for each 'yes' answer 4 points: high quality 2 or 3: moderate 0 or 1: low

To ensure consistency of appraisal, a calibration process was undertaken at the start of the process. Ten studies were assessed by two members of the project team to verify consistency of scoring.

The overall strength of the body of evidence was assessed (where appropriate) on the basis of its size, context, and consistency of the findings, as well as the rigour assessments of individual studies. In assessing the quality and strength of the overall body of evidence, reference was made to FCDO's research quality assessment framework, as outlined in Table 14 (DFID, 2014). When describing the strength of the body of evidence, we comment on its quality, size, context and consistency, in line with the conventions outlined in FCDO's framework.[21] The overall evidence for each set of findings (where possible) was classified as 'strong', 'medium', or 'limited':

- 'strong' evidence: high confidence in findings, large or medium in size, highly or moderately consistent, contextually relevant
- 'medium' evidence: moderate confidence in findings, medium in size, moderately consistent, contextually relevant or not
- 'limited' evidence: moderate to low confidence in findings, medium in size, low consistency, contextually relevant or not.

[21] As per FCDO's research quality assessment framework, there is no set number of studies to denote an adequate or sufficient size of a body of evidence. The research team expects to find variation across themes explored. The research team will determine whether the available evidence constitutes a 'large', 'medium' or 'small' number of studies, in line with FCDO's quality assessment framework. In determining the size of the body of evidence, we document the number of studies that form the evidence base for each theme or category of analysis, considering which aspects of the topic have received more research attention than others.

Annex 6: International Rules and Norms Evidence Mapping Database

The objective of this evidence mapping exercise was to identify and organise empirical evidence about the ways in which international rules and norms translate into action in low- and middle-income countries and lead to improved outcomes for freedom and democracy. This database is the result of a structured search of the literature to identify relevant primary studies and systematic reviews.

The database contains:

1. Database page: A list of all of the documents selected from the rigorous review, which can be filtered according to various criteria. Details of the search strategy and inclusion criteria are documented separately.
2. Analysis page: A set of check-boxes to quickly select sets of studies according to desired criteria, and bar charts showing the number of studies satisfying the combination of criteria chosen.
3. Evidence Gap Map page: The gap map shows the number of studies that addressed each combination of interventions and outcomes.
4. Definitions page: Definitions of the criteria used to describe the studies in the database.

The database enables you to select research studies according to the type of research, its appraised quality, its thematic and geographic focus, and whether the research is related to various norm carriers, consensus or enforcement mechanisms, and outcomes. The list of studies can be filtered to display studies that satisfy multiple criteria by clicking the filter buttons (triangular buttons) at the top of each column on the database tab of the spreadsheet, or by clicking the check-boxes on the analysis tab. At the top of each column the database will count the total number of studies that meet each criterion, the number of studies included after applying the currently active filters, and the percentage of studies included after applying the currently active filters.

On the analysis tab, you can select the filters to be applied and see bar charts showing the number of studies that satisfy the currently-selected combination of filters. There is also a button you can press to reset all filters to include all studies.

The data base can be accessed from the University of Birmingham UBIRA EData Library
https://doi.org/10.25500/edata.bham.00000997