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cent of all mayors; again, this is a much lower proportion than women’s 25 per cent or higher average representation in local councils. In the 11 countries with available data in sub-Saharan Africa, on average only 9 per cent of mayors were women. For South-Eastern Asia and for the three sub-regions of Latin America and the Caribbean, the figures range from 5 to 9 per cent. The four countries with available data in Western Asia had the lowest average proportion of women (1 per cent) at the mayoral level.

Out of the 77 countries or areas with available data, the ones with the highest proportion of women mayors include Latvia (25 per cent), Mauritius (40 per cent), New Zealand (26 per cent) and Serbia (26 per cent). The low proportion of women among mayors is evident worldwide; other than the above-mentioned four countries, the averages were below 20 per cent in all countries or areas with available data, and three (Bangladesh, Mayotte and Trinidad and Tobago) had no female mayor (see Statistical Annex).

Mayoral positions are in the same class, so to speak, as heads of State or Government and presiding officers of parliament, being positions that are hardest for women to attain. For women, the difficulty of attaining the top executive position may be related in part to the stereotypical perception that women lack the leadership qualities necessitated by the job. Women are relatively more successful in landing positions as members of a legislative or governing body. For example, the five Nordic countries may boast relatively high representation of women among members of parliament and local councils (the percentage of women in these bodies range from 26 to 47 per cent in all five countries). In contrast, only one of the five countries had a woman head of State (Finland) or head of Government (Iceland), and only one had a woman presiding over its parliament (Iceland). With respect to mayors, the proportion of women among mayors in the five countries range from only 9 to 17 per cent (see Statistical Annex).

The difficulties of combining family life, work life and politics remain a severe obstacle to women seeking political office. Among the political challenges that women face, the prevalence of the “masculine model” of political life and lack of party support feature prominently. In particular, the barriers to the political participation of women at the local level may be related to lack of community support, lack of family co-responsibility within households to release women from unpaid household work, little recognition and legitimacy allocated to their contribution within public power spheres, and the lack of economic resources to pursue a candidature.

B. The judiciary

1. National courts

The judiciary is still predominantly male except in Eastern Europe. In 11 of the 12 countries with available data in that sub-region, female judges in general outnumbered male judges, with 64 per cent of all judges in the average country being female (table 5.7). The situation is not as positive for women judges in the Supreme Court, the apex of judicial power within the national judiciary. As with other areas already examined in earlier sections and in other chapters, so it is with the judiciary; the further up the judicial hierarchy, the smaller the representation of women. Thus, in the supreme courts in the Eastern European sub-region, women outnumbered men in only four countries. Notable, however, is that in two of these (Bulgaria and Romania), women in the Supreme Court outnumbered men to an even greater degree than they did in all courts combined, occupying 78 and 75 per cent, respectively, of the Supreme Court seats.

In Western Europe and Western Asia, the proportion of women in all courts was below 50 per

27 International IDEA, 2005.
28 Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres Mexico, 2006.