



12 October 2016—“This story shows just what happens when you put girls in the driver’s seat” – Nadine Krysostan, UNFPA Brussels Office at UNRIC’s screening of Driving with Selvi to mark the [International Day of the Girl Child](#).

Selvi, like so many girls living within India’s patriarchal culture, is forced to marry at a young age, only to find herself in a violent and abusive marriage. One day in deep despair, she chooses to escape, going to a highway with the intention of throwing herself under the wheels of a bus. Instead she gets on the bus, choosing to live... and goes on to become South India’s first female taxi driver.

On 11 October 2016 at the Italian Cultural Institute, Ciné-ONU was proud to partner with the [Mission of Canada to the European Union](#) and the NGOs supporting the [European Week of Action for Girls](#), and welcome Selvi with her youngest daughter to Brussels, along with a distinguished panel of guests for the Belgian premiere screening of Driving with Selvi.

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Selvi and her daughter at the Italian Cultural Institute. Photo: UNRIC

The Canadian Ambassador to the EU, Daniel J Costello, began the evening by explaining why Canada led the call for an International Day of the Girl Child. Emphasising commitment to ending discrimination, violence against girls, and harmful practices like child marriage, the theme this year is based on the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) : Girls' Progress = Goals' Progress: What Counts for Girls.

The European Week of Action for Girls aims to ensure that girls' empowerment is promoted and their rights are protected in the EU's external action, through adequate policies, funding and programs. Ciné-ONU's screening of Driving with Selvi is part of many [events being held in Brussels this week.](#)

The screening was followed by a discussion with Selvi herself, Elisa Paloschi, director and producer, Jackline Waweru, representative of the DSW Youth-to-Youth initiative based in Kenya's Coast region, Nadine Krysostan, Programme Coordination and Liaison Specialist of the Brussels Office of UNFPA, and moderated by Caroline Petit, Deputy Director of the UN

Regional Information Centre in Brussels (UNRIC).



Q & A. Photo: UNRIC

Elisa explains how *Driving with Selvi* has been a powerful catalyst for gender equality in India through grassroots screenings, education, livelihood training and job opportunities.

Jackline Waweru shared her moving story and provided powerful words on the importance of female empowerment for girls, women, boys and men. Having been an activist since the age of 15, Jackline stressed how girls can be agents for change in communities, stating “At times I felt like giving up, but I wake up and remember the change I can make for even just one girl in my community.”

The audience were reminded throughout the discussion that education is key in changing attitudes, as well as of the importance to engage boys and men in this conversation. Nadine Krysostan emphasised, “Women hold up half the sky and represent much of the world's unrealised potential. They are natural leaders.” Furthermore, this story is one of many in India and we need to think about the stories that are not told.

Following the screening of Driving with Selvi and the inspiring discussion about gender equality with the heart-warming presence of protagonist Selvi and her youngest daughter, Caroline Petit concluded with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's words, "investing in girls is not just the smart thing to do, it's the right thing to do".

Please find the [handout to our event here](#) , and for more great photos from the night, [please click here](#).