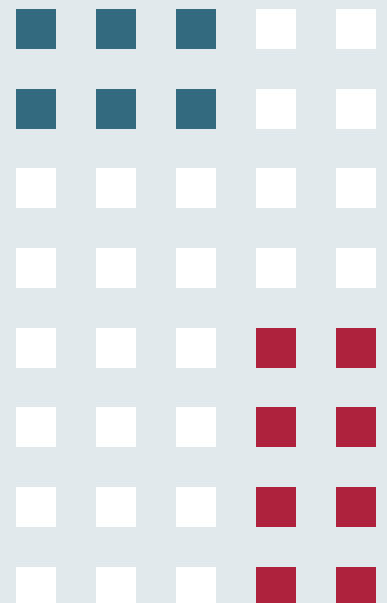


Analysis of the Representation of Women in Public Functions of the Republic of North Macedonia



Identified Trends and Challenges in the
Last Ten Years and Recommendations
for the Future



**Project: "Together for Gender Equality:
Building Support for Gender-Inclusive Policies"**

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List of Acronyms

SCPC	State Commission for Prevention of Corruption
SSO	State Statistical Office
SSHI	State Sanitary and Health Inspectorate
ZELS	Association of the Local Self-Government Units
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MoLSP	Ministry of Labour and social Policy
MoE	Ministry of Economy
MoEPP	Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MoC	Ministry of Culture
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoI	Ministry of the Interior
MoISA	Ministry of Information Society and Administration
МИОА	Министерство за информатичко општество и јавна администрација

Introduction

This analysis looks at the representation and participation of women in leadership positions at multiple levels of social governance over the past decade and covers the period from 2014 to 2024. It analyses the distribution of leadership positions between women and men in the state and public administration, including participation in the executive branch among members of government and in line ministries, as well as the state of affairs in the institutions that are part of the administration at the central and local levels and in the public sector. The analysis includes monitoring the situation in the last ten years to give an overview of current conditions and trace the trend of improvement over the years, if any.

Over the past decade, various political structures have influenced women's participation in senior management positions, requiring a focused approach to improve their inclusion. However, the current distribution of power and governance is still far from achieving full gender parity, as the ratio of distribution of leadership positions between women and men for this important indicator, which will allow women equal participation in government, equal access to decision-making processes and equal distribution of power in society.

The inclusion of women in leadership roles in different countries in Europe serves as a critical indicator of the overall political situation regarding women's rights and their representation in leadership positions. This situational indicator is simultaneously affected by significant achievements as well as by ongoing challenges in the field.

While it is true that several Western European countries have made significant strides towards achieving almost full gender parity in political

representation and in leadership positions held by women, the situation in the Balkans and in our country is still lagging far behind. Among the first countries to achieve a remarkable level of even more than 50% representation of women in government compositions, according to the latest 2022 World Bank data¹, include: Albania, with the highest level of 66.7%; Finland, with 64.3%; Spain with 63.6%, and Nicaragua with 62.5%.

Furthermore, countries of the Nordic Region, such as Sweden and Norway, have been implementing progressive policies and quotas for more than 20 years that encourage women's participation in politics, as well as the participation of women in government compositions. As a result of these efforts, they have maintained a high proportion of women ministers in their governments for many years – 48.6% in Sweden and 50% in Norway, Germany and the Netherlands – so that they have fully achieved gender parity with 50% women ministers and members of government each.

These countries have proactively introduced a diverse range of policies and practices designed to foster an enabling environment for gender equality in politics and governance, resulting in significant progress in the representation of women in these influential positions.

These initiatives not only fostered a more inclusive policy environment but also served as models for other countries to strive to improve gender equality in governance. Also, some countries, such as France and Spain, have adopted legal frameworks requiring gender-balanced party candidate lists, which not only encourage women's representation in politics and in parliament but also challenge traditional power relations in political party structures.

1 <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/sg-gen-mnst-zs#data-table-section>

Namely, the Nordic countries, such as **Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden**, are highlighted for their strong and comprehensive frameworks that effectively promote gender equality, which includes more specific measures, such as:

**Quotas:**

implementing mandatory gender quotas required for political party structures, as well as for senior executives and corporate boards, thus ensuring adequate representation of women in politics, parliament and government.

**Parental leave:**

establishing supportive parental leave policies that actively encourage an equitable distribution of childcare responsibilities between both parents, fostering a balanced approach to family responsibilities.

**Equal pay legislation:**

enacting laws that are deliberately designed to ensure gender pay parity, which consequently supports and strengthens women's participation in the labour force.

This legal framework has not only transformed governance but also serves as a model for other European countries trying to strengthen the position of women in leadership. In contrast, countries such as Hungary and Poland are still struggling with significant barriers, including entrenched stereotypes and insufficient policy support, that hinder the advancement of women to leadership roles.

However, the effectiveness of these measures is often debated: while some argue that quotas are essential to achieving gender equality, for others, they can undermine the principle of meritocracy and the autonomy of political entities. Still others cite women's lack of interest in participating in politics and government, not sufficiently aware that it stems from traditionally established systems of roles and responsibilities that are themselves already limiting. Women often unwittingly and unconsciously accept these traditional values and expectations and assume the roles assigned to them by societal

norms, related to their primary role of caring for children and the home, rather than full participation in politics and government.

This current state of affairs highlights the complexity in leading gender equality initiatives, suggesting that, although some progress has been made in this direction, the path to true equality remains fraught with challenges that require continued advocacy and adaptation to the local context. The prevailing circumstances in Eastern Europe, especially in the Balkans, continue to show a less favourable outlook for women. Or, while the share of women in parliament is higher, the share of women in executive positions in government is lower, and vice versa. For example, in Serbia, where women make up almost half of the electorate, their representation in parliament remains at only 17%, while the share of women ministers in government is 36%. In the Republic of North Macedonia, according to the last parliamentary elections of

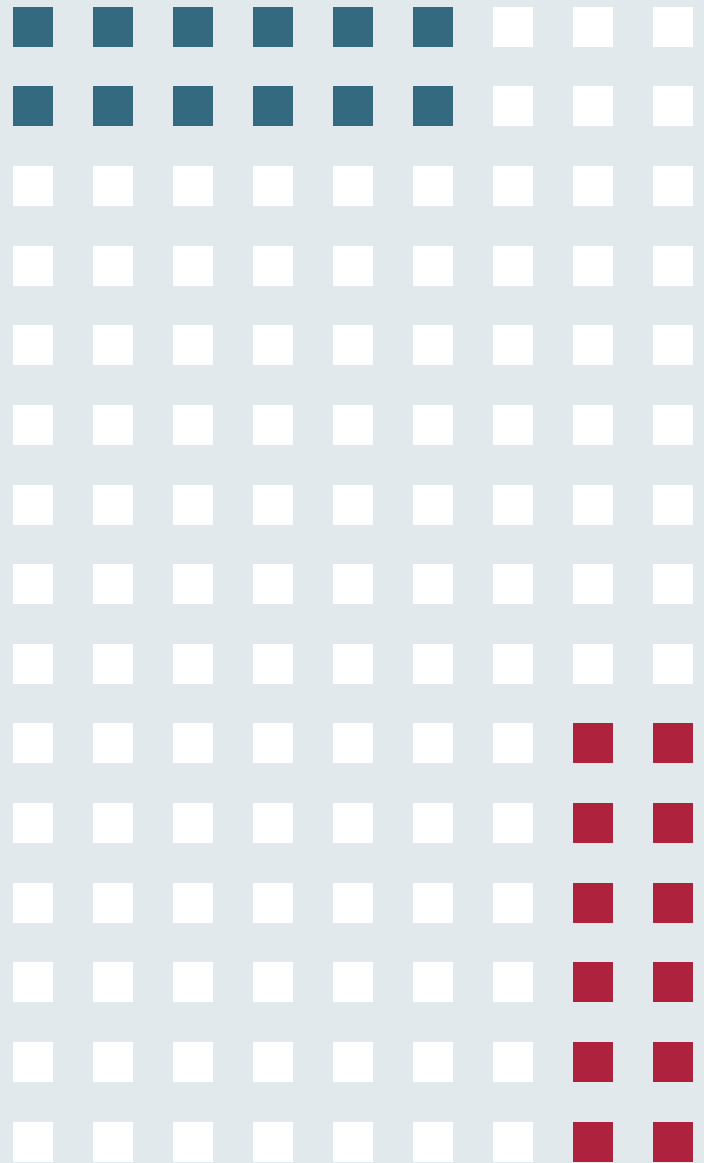


2024, this share is quite reversed, with 34% representation of women in the Assembly² and 15% of women ministers in the Government. This stark contrast with Finland and Sweden, for example, underscores the critical role of supportive policies and cultural attitudes in fostering women's participation in government and politics.

Furthermore, addressing these disparities requires not only targeted initiatives but also comprehensive reforms that challenge existing stereotypes and promote an inclusive environment for women in all sectors and at all levels of government.

Such efforts must be prioritised to ensure that the progress seen in more egalitarian societies can inspire similar changes in regions that are still struggling with traditional gender roles.

2 <https://www.sobranie.mk/statistika.nspix>



**Context and
Significance of Senior
Management Positions
for the Distribution of
Power and Influence**

The complex nature of gender representation in leadership positions in the executive, central and local government is multi-layered and complex, especially including but not limited to ethnicity and social status, which can significantly affect the perception and achievement of gender equality in different countries and regions, each with its own unique socio-political approach.

It is true that many progressive European states often advocate promoting gender equality as a fundamental component of their national identities and values. However, actual policy implementation processes can show considerable variation, often depending on the political ideology prevailing in a country. They are also highly dependent on the specific local context. In the case of Eastern Europe, for example, the enduring legacy of communism has created a complex picture of challenges and opportunities regarding women's political participation and assumption of leadership roles in the institutions of the system, where they can significantly influence decision-making and the distribution of power in society.

Democratisation processes have opened up new avenues for civic engagement and representation. At the same time, they discovered entrenched societal attitudes that serve as significant barriers to achieving substantive representation of women in positions that would allow them higher social status and influence in social and political life. Consequently, undertaking a comprehensive examination of gender representation through this nuanced and multi-layered analysis illuminates these differences in different contexts at the central and local levels, differences in terms of specific sectors and activities, etc. At the same time, the analysis highlights the need to develop tailored approaches that address the specific cultural, historical and socio-political factors that critically influence women's roles and participation in governance across Europe.

Thus, while some Western European countries are taking significant steps towards gender equality, Eastern Europe is often lagging behind, revealing a complex problem that highlights the need for tailored strategies to address local cultural and institutional challenges, women's perceptions of leadership, etc.

With regard to the situation in Macedonia, it has been observed that women leaders predominantly adopt participatory leadership styles, which prioritise empathy and collaborative efforts in their approach to governance, as noted by Bundaleska, Mileva et al. in their 2022 analysis.³ However, despite the existence of these laudable leadership qualities, women continue to encounter significant barriers that limit their ability to hold senior leadership positions. The current challenges that persist in our country and in the Balkans require sustained advocacy and comprehensive structural reforms to advance gender equality and take on roles and responsibilities in senior management positions.

3 Bundaleska, E., Trajkoska, S., & Mileva, I. (2022). Promoting greater role of women as leaders in the Macedonian marketing sector. <https://albanica.al/CRJ/article/view/644/604>

1.1.

Challenges in the Balkans

The persistence of traditional attitudes and entrenched social norms significantly hampers the aspirations of women who want to step into higher political and leadership positions and take on leadership roles. Namely, there is a “significant degree of scepticism regarding women’s abilities to lead effectively” prevailing in society. This concern is thoroughly examined by Pavlović and Ljumović in their 2015 publication.⁴ Furthermore, they note that the implementation of gender equality strategies has proven insufficient in addressing systemic barriers that hinder women’s professional advancement, which negatively affects their presence on the political scene.

Just to illustrate, the composition of governments in the current neighbourhood parliaments shows that, apart from Albania, which currently leads highly in terms of representation of women in the executive branch (66.7%), others lag far behind. Namely, the share of women in government in Serbia is approximately 30%, reflecting a gradual increase in women’s representation over the years, but nevertheless underscoring the need for further progress. The participation of women in government in Croatia is around 45%, which shows a more balanced approach to gender representation in the political arena, stressing the importance of continuing efforts across the region to ensure that women’s voices are equally heard and valued in governance. In Montenegro, the share of women in government is around 30%, similar to Serbia, which highlights the current challenges faced by women politicians in achieving greater influence in decision-making bodies. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the situation remains even more challenging, with women

occupying about 20% of government positions, reflecting deep-rooted cultural and structural barriers that hinder their participation in the executive branch.

In this context is the effort to do this analysis to determine the situation in Macedonia, with an attempt to collect data for the last 10 years. The data relate not only to the executive branch, but also to the administration at the central level, as well as local government and institutions and agencies under local jurisdiction. The analysis focuses on collecting data and identifying appropriate trends in the representation of women in leadership positions, but also on a large body of qualitative data on the barriers they face in performing these roles, from which appropriate conclusions and recommendations for the future will derive.

4 Pavlović, D., & Ljumović, I. (2016). *Prospects and Challenges for Female Leaders from the Balkans*.

1.2.

Legal Framework for the Appointment of Individuals to Management Positions

The appointment to management positions at the central and local levels in the Republic of North Macedonia is not fully and comprehensively regulated in a single place. It is considered within the framework of several substantive laws that regulate a particular matter/area (such as, e.g., the Law on Social Protection, the Law on Health Protection, the Law on Culture, etc.).

Appointments and nominations are also linked to several other systemic laws governing the work of the executive branch (Law on the Government) or of the local government (Law on the Local Self-Government), which also govern certain powers provided for by decentralisation. In this sense, there are quite a few differences as to who appoints whom, so the directors of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools are appointed by the municipality, while the directors of public health facilities are appointed by the Ministry of Health. Furthermore, directors of public enterprises and directors of public institutions established by the municipality (such as libraries, cultural homes and theatres) are appointed by the municipality, and some national cultural institutions (again theatres and libraries) are still appointed by the Ministry of Culture. At the same time, ministries have the possibility of taking away certain jurisdiction by the line ministry from the municipality. Moreover, a number of positions are designated as senior management officers within the administration and public sector, and are regulated under the Law on Administrative Servants and the Law on Public Sector Employees,

through a merit-based nomination and selection procedure.

In the context of unifying the legal regulation related to appointments, it is worth highlighting the attempt to draft an entirely new Law on the Senior Management in Civil Service⁵, based on the principle of merit and professionalisation of senior civil service management, which will prescribe all standards of nomination, selection and evaluation.

The proposed law on senior civil service management was drafted back in 2019 and was submitted by the Ministry of Information Society and Administration (MoISA) and approved at a government session, after which the proposal was submitted to the Assembly, i.e. to the Committee on Political System. However, the motion was withdrawn from parliamentary procedure after one year of submission and before it was considered by MPs in plenary. The reasons given for the withdrawal include revision and adjustment of certain articles for compliance with the Law on Public Sector Employees and the Law on Administrative Servants. This process of adjustment of the existing proposal, or of drafting a completely new one, took more than a year and was conducted behind closed doors. In May 2022, a notice was uploaded on the National Electronic Register of Regulations (ENER), informing that the drafting of a new law has commenced, with a

5 Илиевска, Мартина: Висока раководна служба – Дистинкција меѓу политичкото и професионалното, 2022. <https://idscs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/D0%92%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BE%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%81%D0%BB%D1%83%D0%B6%D0%B1-D0%B0-%D0%9C%D0%9A.pdf>

specified deadline, stating that the draft text would be posted on 10 May 2022. However, since the initially set deadline was missed, the Minister of the then Ministry of Information Society and Administration indicated in several public statements that further consultations were taking place among the coalition partners. The Minister stressed that the law will make a distinction between political and management positions in institutions and will set clear mechanisms for merit-based selection, monitoring and evaluation, with limited possibility of abuse. Meaning, this law is still waiting for better times.

Anyway, all of the above comes down to a certain form. By contrast, in their essence, appointments are inherently shaped by a number of other factors, such as political ties, ethnic quotas, and cultural barriers. Recruitment processes often favour established networks of influence within parties, which marginalise women, thereby limiting their opportunities for leadership roles.

This systemic challenge is exacerbated by cultural expectations and organisational practices that support gender inequalities. Unfortunately, stereotypes are nurtured in the Republic of North Macedonia that hinder women's progress in governance, with significant individual, organisational, and cultural factors being identified as barriers (Кафтанџиева и Наков 2021). Moreover, women in Macedonia have high inactivity rates because they often put domestic responsibilities first, which further limits their chances of entering leadership positions (Abazi and Atanasovska 2015). Despite these barriers, initiatives aimed at strengthening gender diversity in social and political life are intensifying, indicating a possible shift towards more inclusive practices in the future. However, deep-rooted cultural norms and political dynamics continue to pose significant challenges.

The proposed drafting of a new Law on the Senior Management in Civil Service represents a significant step forward towards advancing meritocratic and professional standards in leadership positions. By focusing on the principles of merit and professionalisation, this initiative aims to establish comprehensive guidelines for the selection and evaluation of the expertise and qualities required for leadership positions.

In this context, the inclusion of positive action measures to promote selection of women in leadership positions underscores the commitment to fostering diversity and equality for women in administration. This legislative effort not only seeks to improve the quality of the performance of leadership roles, but also aims to create a more inclusive environment that reflects broader societal values of equity and representation. Thus, the successful implementation of these standards can serve as a model for other sectors, promoting a culture of equity in relation to senior management positions in the public administration and in the public sector.

1.3.

Barriers to Women's Advancement in the Workplace to Leadership and Senior Management Positions

The analysis also attempted to explore some existing findings and insights about the barriers faced by women in advancing in the workplace. Thus, one of the studies identified individual, organisational, and cultural factors as significant barriers to women's promotion to management, especially in the financial sector (Кафтанчиева и Наков 2021).⁶ In this context, some of the following more specific barriers are highlighted: gender bias, inadequate mentoring conditions, and a lack of support for work-life balance, which together hinder women's advancement to senior management positions. These insights highlight the urgent need for institutions to adopt targeted strategies that address these challenges, fostering a more inclusive atmosphere in which women can excel and rise to leadership or senior management positions.

Current circumstances suggest that women are simultaneously experiencing advances and encountering significant barriers in the realisation of their professional capacities. The current situation reveals that women are making strides and facing significant challenges in realising their professional potential. This complex reality underscores the importance of implementing targeted policies and initiatives that not only advocate for gender equality in the workplace, but also address systemic barriers that hinder women's progress.

Establishing an inclusive atmosphere that encourages women to advance in their careers is essential to unlocking their full potential and stimulating economic development in the region. In short, the status of women in the Republic of North Macedonia reflects a multi-layered concept of progress and barriers. Although there are signs of progress in women's professional skills, there are significant barriers hindering their comprehensive inclusion in leadership roles. This underscores the urgent need for targeted policies and initiatives designed to foster gender equality at all levels of government. By fostering an inclusive environment that emphasises women's motivation for leadership and professional development, the Republic of North Macedonia can empower women and at the same time foster broader economic growth in the region. Addressing these issues not only goes beyond the need for social justice but is also a strategic necessity for sustainable development.

⁶ Кафтанчиева, Тамара; Наков, Леонид; ОДРЖЛИВО ЛИДЕРСТВО НА ПРОМЕНИ ЗА ЕФЕКТИВНО УПРАВУВАЊЕ СО ОРГАНИЗАЦИСКИТЕ ПРОМЕНИ. Knowledge: International Journal; 2021, Vol. 45 Issue 1, p61-67, 7p.

1.4.

Current Trends in Women's Employment in Administration and in the Public Sector

Of the available registers of the MoISA⁷, out of a total of 110,169 employees in the public sector in 2023, 62,585 were women, or 56.8%; while men were 47,584, or 43.2% of employees.

Unfortunately, these figures are given on a total basis, by type of institutions and agencies, by sectors and activities, etc., but not reflecting the involvement in the management staff. If the distribution of men and women by institutions' type and activity is analysed, it can be concluded that women are most represented in the Constitutional Court (78.26%), in the Council of Public Prosecutors (75%), in independent professional bodies (75%), in the Public Prosecutor's Office (71.88%) and in public institutions (69.09%). On the other hand, the highest representation of men is in public enterprises (81.94%), and their share exceeds 50% in municipalities (57.47%), in bodies integrated within ministries (57.5%), in ministries (52.08%), as well as in independent state administration bodies (52.26%). However, these data only reflect the employment levels, not representation in senior management positions. A 2022 study on the representation of women in decision-making roles in the public sector and in regulatory bodies, including directors, governing board members and supervisory board members, found that women represent, on average, 18% of the governing structures of regulatory bodies, 48% of the governing structures of public health facilities, and 45% of the governing structures of cultural public

institutions. Some of these data are now also the subject of this analysis, looking at the situation over the past 10 years.⁸

In the course of 2022, the activity rate for women⁹ stood at 44.8%, compared to 65.9% for men. The employment rate for women was 39.6%, versus 55.2% for their male counterparts. In primary education, women made up 66.1% of teachers. In secondary education, they made up 58.6% of educators; while in higher education, their representation stood at 47.2%. This suggests that, although women are well represented in education and in teaching roles, it will be interesting to see how many of them will make their way to senior leadership roles in this field.

Compared to other professional fields, the Republic of North Macedonia shows a significant gender gap in terms of women's representation. Only half of able-bodied women are employed, compared to the EU-28 average of 67.3%, which limits their overall participation and advancement in the labour market.

Women and men participate unequally in different sectors and activities, both in administration and in the labour market, i.e. they dominate only in the following sectors – public administration and defence; compulsory social insurance; education; public health and social work. A more detailed analysis of the first group shows that the gap is

7 [2023 FINAL REPORT dated 01.04.2024.pdf](#)

8 Извештај за следење на управувачките структури на институциите од јавниот сектор. <https://cup.org.mk/publication/report-from-monitoring-the-managment-structures-in-public-institutions>

9 Државен завод за статистика: Жените и мажите во Република Северна Македонија, публикувано во 2023. https://www.stat.gov.mk/publikacii/2023/ZeniteMazite_2023.pdf

widened, mainly, in the sectors of health and social protection and education; where women's participation is highest, with 78.4% and 62.7% of the total employed staff in these sectors in 2020. All other sectors, especially economic ones, show male predominance, with the largest disparities in the trade, transport and hospitality sectors, at the expense of women in the last quarter of 2020. Men dominate in all occupations¹⁰.

Despite the fact that significant progress has been made over the years in the area of legal frameworks and regulations pertaining to gender equality, the genuine and meaningful inclusion of women in decision-making positions, both in the executive branch and in administration and the public sector, continues to be hampered for a number of reasons.

Most of the reasons relate to entrenched cultural norms, but also to the lack of adequate political and institutional support. That being said, a holistic and multi-layered strategy is needed to effectively confront and address these persistent challenges.



¹⁰ Државен завод за статистика, Попис на населението, 2021 година. https://www.stat.gov.mk/publikacii/2022/POPIS_DZS_web_MK.pdf

Political Representation and Participation in Power Structures



Seats in the Parliament.

In 2023, women held 42.5% of the seats in the national parliament. This figure has been steady since 2002, when a quota was introduced in the Electoral Code, so the situation in the parliament has improved, although there is still room for achieving full gender equality. This situation has been achieved mainly by the introduction of a quota in the Electoral Code (2002), which provided for a minimum 30% participation of individuals of the underrepresented sex on the lists of MPs and Municipal Councillors, which was then expanded in 2006 to require every third person on candidate lists to be of the underrepresented sex. This significantly increased the representation of women in the Assembly and in the Municipal Councils.



Ministerial Positions.

In the current Government, formed in mid-2024, only 15% of government ministers are women, as this survey shows. This figure has varied over the past decade from 2 to 5 women ministers, or 18-20%, but is still far below the potential for equal participation and distribution of power.

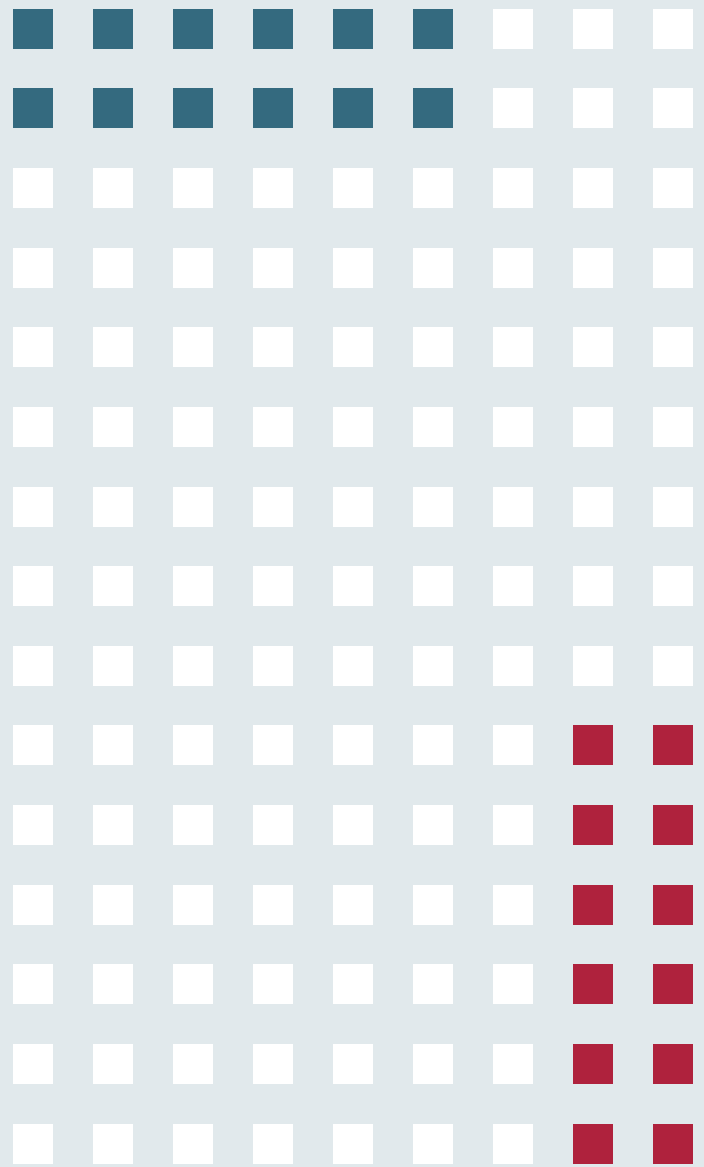


Local Self-Government.

In terms of the representation of women in mayoral positions, the numbers are striking. In 2024, we had women mayors in only 2 out of 80 municipalities, underscoring the fact that the gender gap is present at all levels of government.

With regard to further power structures, an attempt was made to determine the current trends at the level of leadership positions in the fields of health, education, social policy and culture, including public utilities at the local level.

2



Data Collection Methodology

The analysis was conducted between mid-August and late December 2024 and included desk research and the collection of quantitative data on women's participation in leadership positions over the last ten years.

Data collection took place mostly through requests for access to public information. The data were complemented by qualitative data on

experiences and challenges, through organised focus groups with current and former women in leadership positions and an additional survey with 25 women in leadership positions. The focus groups and the survey collected data on the problems and challenges faced by women in leadership positions, as well as their recommendations for improving the situation in this area.

2.1.

Data Collection Methods Used in the Analysis

The analysis used a variety of data collection methods to analyse women's participation in leadership positions over the past decade. These methods included:



- **Desk research.**

The initial phase included a comprehensive review of existing studies, reports and literature related to women in leadership positions in the country and beyond, especially those emanating from UN agencies, civil society organisations and government institutions. This helped to establish a basic understanding of the current state of affairs and of the previous findings.



- **Collection of quantitative and qualitative data.**

After the desk research, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected from relevant sources. This included government reports,

corporate records, and interviews with stakeholders, which provided a well-rounded overview of the issue.



- **Requests for access to public information.**

Institutions of the executive branch, of the administration and of the public sector, as well as local-level institutions were identified to which requests for access to public information were sent in order to obtain the necessary data. This method was key to obtaining accurate data on the representation of women in leadership positions in various political structures in the last ten years. 121 requests for free access to public information were sent, including to all ministries, to the Government and to the Assembly, to the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC), to all municipalities in the country, as well as to other relevant institutions holding information pertinent to this analysis.



- **Focus groups.** 3 focus groups were organised with women currently working or having worked in public administration at management levels. Discussions with them were aimed at obtaining insights into their experiences and challenges and the impacts of their executive branch roles. The focus groups were made up of women in leadership positions in the education, health and social protection sectors.



- **Survey.** An online survey was conducted with relevant questions designed to explore the experiences and challenges faced by women in the performance of their duties in leadership positions. This approach allowed for the collection of valuable data on barriers, as well as appropriate suggestions and

recommendations to support women in the performance of leadership roles based on identified trends and patterns related to women's experiences in the management of institutions of a particular type.

These various methods have provided a comprehensive understanding of the barriers and opportunities for women in leadership positions, forming the basis for developing strategies to improve their participation in the executive branch.

Table 1: Timeline

Activities	Implementation Period	Final Result/Outcome
Desk Research:		
Review of existing studies, reports, and literature on women in leadership positions.	Mid-August 2024.	Collected all relevant documents related to the research topic (women in leadership positions).
Data Collection:		
Collection of quantitative and qualitative data from relevant sources, including government reports, corporate records, and interviews with stakeholders.	August 2024.	Collected all relevant data sources, including government reports, corporate records, and State Statistical Office (SSO) publications.
Focus groups:		
Organised focus groups to gather detailed insights (from women former and current incumbents of leadership positions).	September 2024.	Conducted 3 online focus groups to discuss the topic and gather detailed insights in order to validate the findings (State Secretaries from the MoH, MoES and MoLSP).
Key Factor Surveys:		
A survey with a set of questions about experiences, challenges and suggestions for improving the situation in the area.	September 2024.	Completed survey of 25 women holders of leadership positions over the past 10 years. Survey data processed by quantitative and qualitative analysis.
Preparation of appropriate overviews and detection of trends regarding the coverage of women and men according to the type of office (ministers, deputies, state secretaries, etc.), as well as the time and the duration of their office.	October 2024.	Appropriate overviews were made and trends detected regarding the women's coverage by sector, type of office (women ministers, women deputy ministers, women state secretaries, etc.) as well as the time and the duration of their office.
Policy Development and Recommendations:		
Gap analysis.	October 2024.	Shortcomings in current policies and practices are identified.
Best practices: an overview of best practices from other regions.	October 2024.	Best practices from other regions are identified.
Recommendations: develop strategic recommendations and action plans to improve women's participation in executive positions.	End of October 2024.	Developed strategic recommendations and action plans to improve women's participation in executive positions.
Creating a comprehensive public policy document aimed at strengthening women's participation in leadership positions.	November 2024.	A detailed document has been prepared that focuses on public policies to improve the inclusion of women in leadership positions.

Data collection instruments were developed (requests for access to public information, data collection memos and letters, a guide for conducting focus groups, and a questionnaire/survey set up as a Google form, etc.). 121 requests for access to public information were sent to 80 municipalities at the local level, to the Government, to the Assembly, to all ministries, to the SCPC, to ZELS and to other institutions possible holders of information.

From the total of 80 requests for free access to public information submitted to all municipalities at the local level, a response was received from

75 municipalities,

and part of the responses were received from ZELS regarding the number of mayors per municipality in the designated period.

As for the ministries, out of **18 requests for free access to public information**, feedback was received from

7 ministries,

as follows:

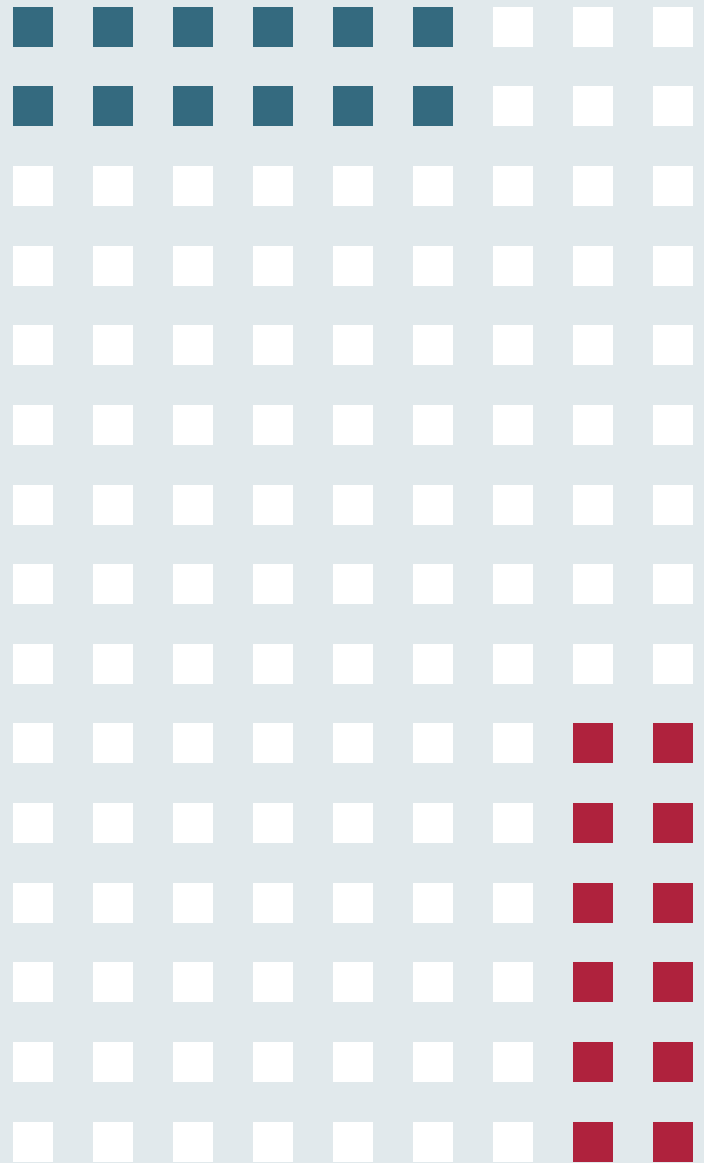
- Ministry of the Interior,
- Ministry of Defence,
- Ministry of Economy and Labour,
- Ministry of Justice,
- Ministry of Education and Science,
- Ministry of Health,
- Ministry of Finance,
- then, from the Government,
- as well as from the SCPC

however, no reply has been received from the Assembly. Replies were also received from the SSHI, the Official Gazette, the State Municipal Inspectorate, the State Construction Inspectorate, the Intelligence Agency, the Administration Agency, the Railway Traffic Regulation Agency, as well as from other agencies; then, from state commissions, the Inspection Council, public enterprises and other public institutions and agencies. The analysis lacked data from the health sector, as the line Ministry failed to provide appropriate answers within the statutory deadline. Therefore, the procedure was repeated in October 2024, after which relevant data were obtained.

Limitations in the data collection method.

The biggest challenge for this exercise was that there are no organised databases with disaggregated data in the country, so none of the institutions is considered to be information holder as to the number of women ministers, women deputy ministers, women state secretaries and women directors of state administration institutions and of public sector institutions. Thus, all the responses received were the result of the good will of the institutions and of their corresponding officers for free access to public information to provide us with requested information. The same challenge applied to municipalities at the local level, as well as to institutions under their jurisdiction, such as public enterprises, primary and secondary schools, kindergartens and other local-level public institutions. An additional challenge was that the analysis sought to retrieve data for the period 2014–2024, which posed a heavy burden in terms of searching for data relevant for a past period, after which some institutions, municipalities, etc. have changed or merged. In consequence, some data related to education, time and duration of office, etc., remained inaccessible and incomplete.

3



Relevant Overviews of the Representation of Women in Senior Management Positions

3.1.

Representation in the Executive Branch

3.1.1. Overview of Women Ministers in the Government in the Period 2014–2024

For a total period of ten years, from 2014 to 2024, in which the country changed 8 Presidents of the Government (including 3 Technical Governments), the total number of women in ministerial positions ranged between 2 and a maximum of 5 women ministers in the government composition. The estimated shares range from 14% to 31%, depending on the number of line ministries, which ranged from 14 to 20 over the years. The share of women, as a proportion in the total number of members of government, including ministers without portfolio, is even lower, ranging from 8 to 20%. This is a very disappointing statistics, when considering the overall situation with gender representation in the executive branch.

Apparently, as part of the 2020 technical government, we have witnessed what can probably be considered the highest representation of women ministers in the Government, with this achievement reflecting an average of 31%, or 5 out of a total of 16 line ministries. However, within the same Government, these 5 women ministers constituted only 19% of the overall number of members of the Government, out of a total of 26 members. And when we look back at 2014, we find ourselves faced with an even more disappointing reality, with the lowest number of women ministers, amounting to just 2 ministries, or 14% of all ministerial positions available at the time; while the proportion within the members of the Government was only 8%.



The goal to be achieved in accordance with the current European trends for an equal

50 : 50

distribution of power between men and women ministers and members of government is not a bit reflected in the factual situation in the Republic of North Macedonia.

In 2017 and in 2020, we had a total of 4 women ministers, or a rather unimpressive 25% compared to their male counterparts holding ministerial positions; while the proportion in the total number of members of the Government ranged between 16% and 20%. In the current Government, which comprises a total of 20 ministries, only 3 women ministers have been appointed, or a rather unsatisfactory 15% of women ministers compared to men ministers. The same number constitutes 13% as a proportion in the total number of members of the Government (including ministers without portfolio and Deputy Prime Ministers). It is indeed discouraging to admit that, over the course of one decade, there has been not a

single validated upward trend correlating to any significant increase in women's participation in the executive branch. On the contrary, there has been some decline in women's representation, which undoubtedly raises concerns about the

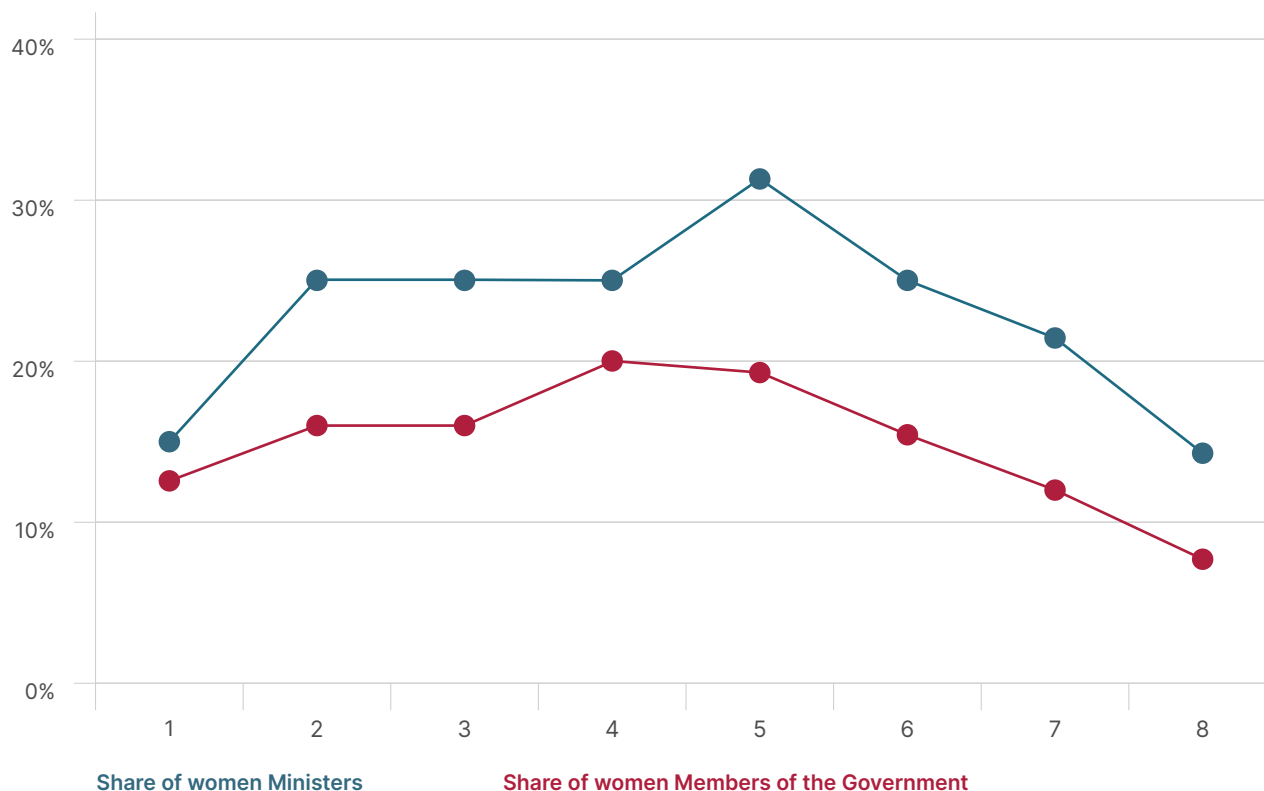
long-term implications for achieving gender equality. These data are shown in the chart below.

Table 2: Representation of Women Ministers by Years and by Terms of Office of the Presidents of the Government

No.	Year President of the Government	Date of the Inaugural Session	Number of Line Ministries	Number of Members of the Government ¹¹	Number of Women Ministers	Share of Women Ministers	Share of Women Members of the Government
1	2024 Hristijan Mickovski	23.6.2024	20	24	 3	15 %	13 %
2	2024 Talat Xhaferi (Technical Government)	28.1.2024	16	25	 4	25 %	16 %
3	2022 Dimitar Kovačevski	16.1.2022	16	25	 4	25 %	16 %
4	2020 Zoran Zaev	30.8.2020	16	20	 4	25 %	20 %
5	2020 Oliver Spasovski (Technical Government)	3.1.2020	16	26	 5	31 %	19 %
6	2017 Zoran Zaev	31.5.2017	16	26	 4	25 %	15 %
7	2016 Emil Dimitriev (Technical Government)	18.1.2016	14	25	 3	21 %	12 %
8	2014 Nikola Gruevski	19.6.2014	14	26	 2	14 %	8 %

¹¹ The specified number of members of the Government is also inclusive of the President of the Government and their deputies (Deputy Prime Ministers) and ministers without portfolio.

Chart 1: Share of Women Ministers and Women Members of the Government in the Period 2014–2024



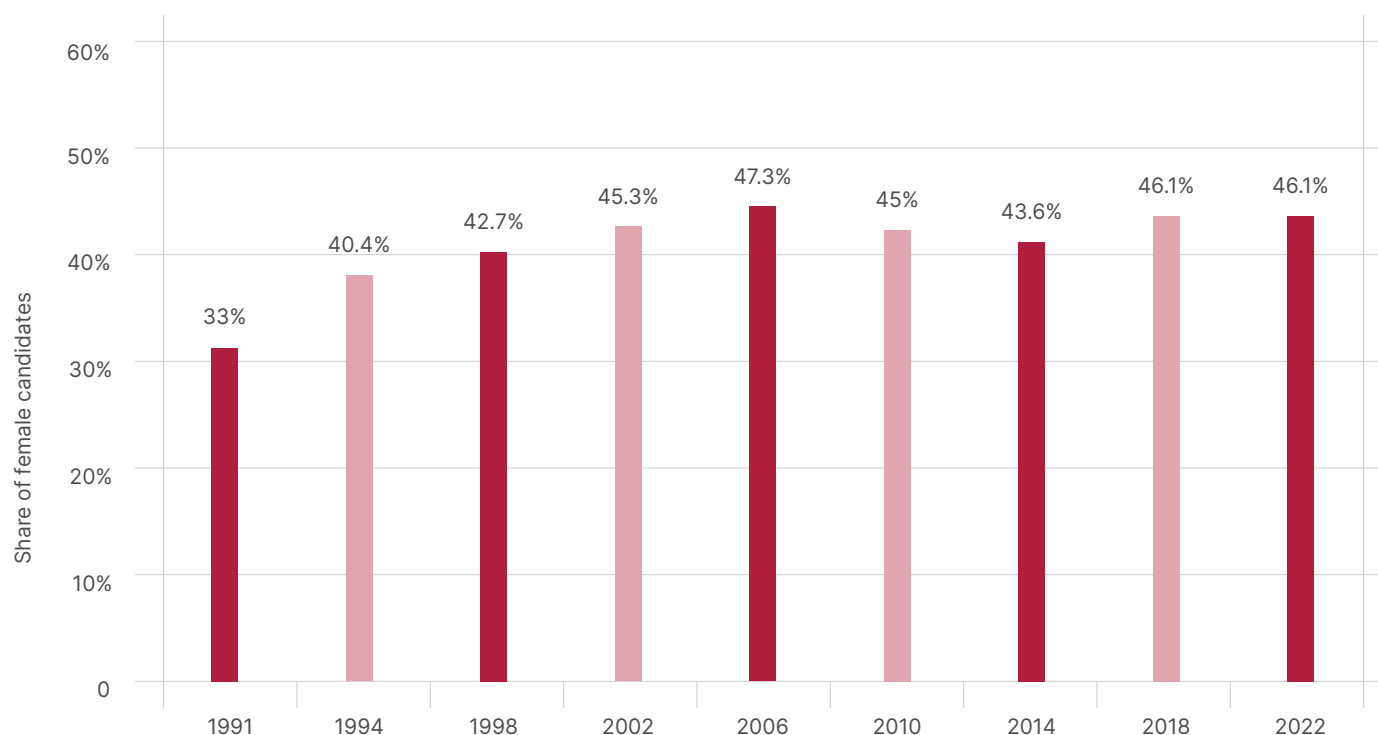
A comparison with some of the better European examples, such as Sweden, Norway and Finland, shows that they have implemented various policies to promote gender equality in political representation at all levels, including quotas and support for women's leadership initiatives. The current government in Sweden, which took office in the fall of 2022 following the parliamentary elections of the same year, has an insignificantly higher number of men than women. Of the 24 ministers, 13 are men and 11 are women, yielding a share of 54.2% men ministers and 45.8% women ministers¹². Although Sweden is no longer upholding legal quotas for women as ministerial candidates, most parties have internal policies to promote women's participation. Some political parties have voluntary quotas.

Tracking the participation of women in the Swedish parliament over the years is shown in the following chart, in which women were represented at 33% as early as in 1991. Then follows a relatively steady upward trend of around 40%, all the way up to a share of 46.1%, which is very close to the share held by women in ministerial positions in the most recent Government of 2022.

With regard to the participation of women in parliament, we have made significant progress in Macedonia as a result of the 2021 amendments made to the Electoral Code, when a gender quota was introduced, requiring 30% of candidates on electoral lists at both national and local levels to be of the underrepresented sex. The 2006 amendments provided that every third person on the candidate list be of the underrepresented sex, thus significantly improving the participation of

¹² <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1279301/sweden-number-ministers-government-gender/>

Chart 2: Share of Women in the Swedish Parliament from 1991 to 2022



Sources: Statistics Sweden; Dagens Nyheter, Statista

women in the Assembly. In 2015, yet another set of amendments were made to the Electoral Code, increasing the gender quota to 40%. However, access to decision-making structures for some groups of women, such as Roma women, rural women, and women with disabilities, remains an open issue.¹³ As a result of these changes, the representation of women in the Assembly and in Municipal Councils has been significantly raised, giving us yet another argument in favour of the introduction of quotas in both mayoral candidature and the election of ministers. A large part of the expert community, especially gender equality activists, is already strongly advocating for this arrangement.¹⁴ It has been pending since 2022 and is a matter of the parties' reasonable will to put into practice.

In line with this argument is also the fact that, according to the latest World Bank data from 2022, out of 217 countries in the world, 30 countries already have a share of women in ministerial positions higher than 40%, including: Finland with 64.3%, Spain with 63.6%, Liechtenstein with 60% and Belgium with 57%; with several African and American countries also standing out.

¹³ https://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/2022/MK_WandM-NMK-Report_WEB_0.pdf (p. 13–14)

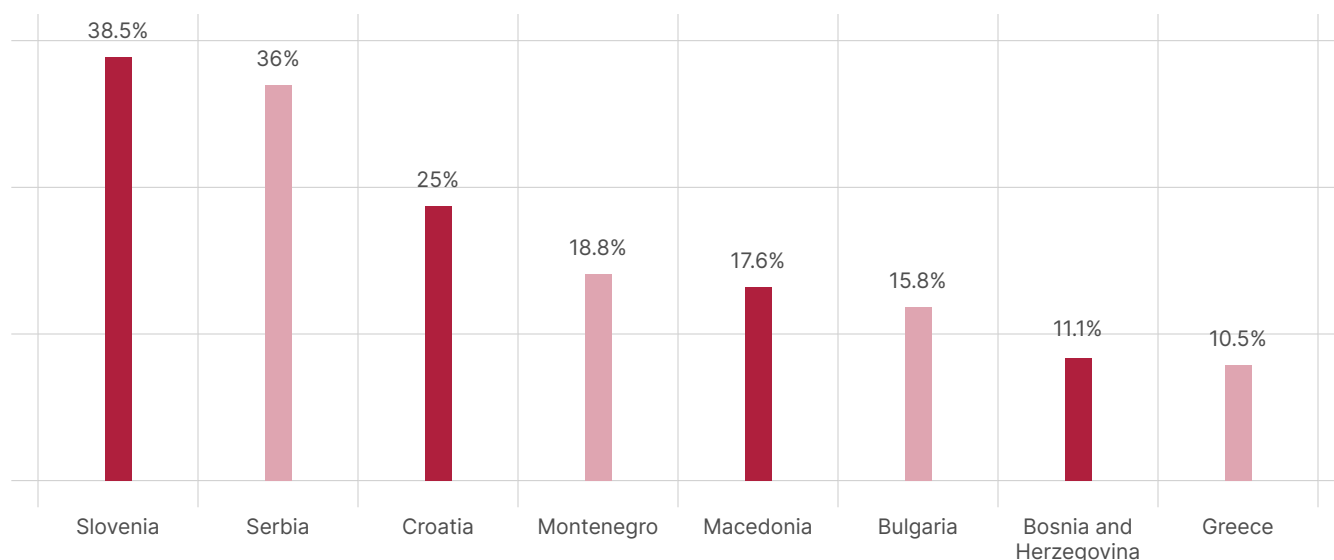
¹⁴ <https://360stepeni.mk/video-partiite-dobija-predlog-za-voveduvane-kvoti-za-da-ima-poveke-zheni-gradonachalnichki-i-ministerki/>

Table 3: Countries with Greater than 40% Share of Women in Ministerial Positions (according to World Bank data)¹⁵

No.	Country	Share of Women in Ministerial Positions (%)
1	Albania	66,7
2	Finland	64,3
3	Spain	63,6
4	Nicaragua	62,5
5	Liechtenstein	60
6	Chile	58,3
7	Belgium	57,1
8	Mozambique	55
9	Andorra	50
10	Columbia	50
11	Germany	50
12	The Netherlands	50
13	Norway	50
14	Canada	48,6
15	South Africa	48,1
16	Sweden	47,8
17	Rwanda	47,6
18	Peru	47,4
19	Costa Rica	45,5
20	New Zealand	45
21	Australia	43,5
22	Estonia	42,9
23	Latvia	42,9
24	Lithuania	42,9
25	Switzerland	42,9
26	Mexico	42,1
27	Iceland	41,7
28	Portugal	41,2
29	Ethiopia	40,9
30	Monaco	40

¹⁵ <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/sg-gen-mnst-zs#data-table-section>

Chart 3: Share of Women in Ministerial Positions in the Wider Balkan Region according to World Bank Data for 2022.



Of the countries in the region, **Albania stands out highly with 66.7%**, where the government, formed in September 2021 by Edi Rama, is made up of 12 women out of a total of 17 members of government. This is the highest share in Albania's history, although, according to the most recent UN data, dating from January 2021, Albania ranked 5th with 9 women in a 16-person cabinet. Edi Rama has been including women at some of the top positions throughout his career, including during his office as the Minister of Culture, Mayor of the Albanian capital Tirana, and as Prime Minister, a position he has been holding since 2013.¹⁶ The rest of the countries in the region are presented in the following chart.

Moreover, the concept of critical mass, which is particularly relevant in this discussion, cannot be overlooked; various studies have proven that achieving a minimum of 30% women's representation significantly improves the critical mass and capacity of women to influence political decisions. Among other data, there are some

established trends that women in politics are more sensitive to the needs of citizens, they are more balanced in decisions and less susceptible to corruption, which, of course, cannot be taken a priori.

Unlike what we might hope for in the future, the current trajectory in our country is quite worrying and suggests that some deliberate and concerted efforts need to be made to institutionalise gender equality. If this is not done, even the small progress that has been made in previous years can be jeopardised, and this can potentially lead to a significant stagnation in the progress of family and social policies that, ideally, are designed to benefit both sexes equally.

¹⁶ Data taken from EuroNews.. <https://www.euronews.com/2021/09/17/women-dominate-top-table-in-albania-s-new-government>

Table 4: Portfolios under the Jurisdiction of Women Ministers in the Period 2014–2024

Year and President of the Government		Number of Women Ministers	Portfolios under the Jurisdiction of Women Ministers
2024	Hristijan Mickovski	 3	MoF, Ministry of Energy, MoES
2024	Talat Xhaferi (Technical Government)	 4	MoD, MoC, MoEPP, Minister without Portfolio
2022	Dimitar Kovačevski	 4	MoD, MoLSP, MoC, Minister without Portfolio
2020	Zoran Zaev	 4	MoD, MoES, MoC, MoLSP
2020	Oliver Spasovski (Technical Government)	 5	MoD, MoJ, MoF, MoLSP, Minister without Portfolio
2017	Zoran Zaev	 4	MoD, MoES, MoLSP, Minister without Portfolio
2016	Emil Dimitriev (Technical Government)	 3	MoLSP, MoC, MoISA
2014	Nikola Gruevski	 2	Mol, MoC

With regard to the **portfolios** held by women within all governments over the past decade, the following table reveals the situation. Women in the past decade have typically been in charge of the portfolios for education, labour and social policy, culture and justice. Very seldom, women have been the Minister of the Interior (2014), Minister of Defence (2020) and current Minister of Finance and Energy (2024), whereas women have never been the Minister of Economy in any government in the last ten years. This situation requires strong public policy initiatives that aim not only to increase the number of women in the executive but also to ensure their inclusion in different lines and portfolios, where their influence can be maximised. Furthermore, cultivating an environment that fosters women's participation in political life and in government is essential to sustain current developments and to foster meaningful change in various sectors.

This variability underscores the need for sustained efforts to ensure not only the appointment and election of women to these positions, but also their retention and strengthening during the respective term of office, which will ultimately foster a more inclusive political environment for both men and women in society.

The term of office of women ministers, deputy ministers and state secretaries has varied and averages about

1,5 years

or at most 2 years, for as long as the Government's term of office has lasted, but there have been cases where the term of office has lasted one year or even only a few months.

3.1.2. Overview of Women Deputy Ministers in the Government in the Period 2014–2024

With regard to the assumption of the office of deputy ministers, although expectations were higher in terms of statistics, the situation is very similar and even slightly worse than the participation of women ministers in the Government. The following table shows the proportion of women deputy ministers as part of the line ministries (25%), and also the proportion covering all the members of government, including ministers without portfolios (21%).

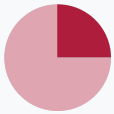
If we look in more detail at the data regarding the representation of women deputy ministers over a period of ten years, we can see a certain increase in the number of women occupying that particular position over the years. Namely, the increase goes from zero to 25% within the line ministries, or 21%, including ministers without portfolios and all members of the Government (together with the Presidents of the Government and the Deputy Prime Ministers). Yet, this increase does not exceed 25%, which is only one-third of the achievement of full gender parity¹⁷ on this issue.

Table 5: Number of Women Deputy Ministers by Years and by Terms of Office of the Presidents of the Government

No.	Year and President of the Government	Date of the Inaugural Session of the Government	Number of Line Ministries	Number of Members of the Government ¹⁸	Number of Women Deputy Ministers	Share of Women Deputy Ministers	Total Share of Women Deputy Ministers in the Government Composition
1	2024 Hristijan Mickovski	23.6.2024	20	24	 5	25 %	21 %
2	2024 Talat Xhaferi (Technical Government)	28.1.2024	16	25	 3	19 %	12 %
3	2022 Dimitar Kovačevski	16.1.2022	16	25	 3	19 %	12 %
4	2020 Zoran Zaev	30.8.2020	16	20	 2	13 %	10 %
5	2020 Oliver Spasovski (Technical Government)	3.1.2020	16	26	 2	13 %	8 %
6	2017 Zoran Zaev	31.5.2017	16	26	0	0 %	0 %
7	2016 Emil Dimitriev (Technical Government)	18.1.2016	14	25	 2	14 %	8 %
8	2014 Nikola Gruevski	19.6.2014	14	26	 1	7,14 %	3,85 %

¹⁷ https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/thesaurus/terms/1258?language_content_entity=en

¹⁸ The specified number of members of the Government is also inclusive of the President of the Government and their deputies (Deputy Prime Ministers) and ministers without portfolio.



Gender parity is a numerical concept related to gender equality and refers to the relative equality in terms of the number and the ratio of women and men, girls and boys, and is often calculated as the quotient of values between women and men for a given indicator.

If there are equal numbers of women and men in politics or in the management of institutions in a given country, the gender parity quotient for that indicator is one.

The greater the gap between women and men, the lower the value of gender parity.

In this particular case, it would be

0,33

(25 % : 75 %)

Starting in 2014, when, according to meticulously collected data from the official websites of the line ministries, as well as from other credible sources, it became clear that there was only one woman deputy minister. In 2015, the figure increased by one more, while for 2017, unfortunately, we do not have any data available to compare the situation. Finally, in 2024, we see the highest number – 5 women deputy ministers, or 25% of line ministries, or 21% as members of the Government. In addition, that number is even lower during the same year in the technical government and amounts to only three women, or 19% of line

ministries, or 12% when calculated in relation to the total number of appointed ministers (with and without portfolio).

This small fluctuation in numbers never exceeded more than 25% and serves as a modest advance in the quest for gender equality within government roles. It reflects broader societal trends and the undeniable impact of policy initiatives that we believe are aimed at improving women's representation in leadership positions. The inconsistent representation of women in deputy ministerial roles further underscores the need for systemic changes in policy frameworks, which could be considered long overdue. As noted in various other European contexts, especially in nations where progressive gender attitudes are prevalent among supporters of political parties, there seems to be a clear correlation between public sentiment and the subsequent appointment of women to positions of influence and power.

This underscores the importance of not only increasing numbers and representation, but also fostering an environment that actively supports women's leadership within the parties themselves, through mentoring programmes and targeted recruitment strategies. By examining successful models from nations where women ministers have progressed, such as those in Scandinavia, policymakers can gain insight into effective practices that could be adapted to improve women's participation in the country's governance structures. Consequently, without a sustained commitment to these reforms, the potential benefits of diverse leadership may be impermanent, perpetuating pre-existing disparities in women's representation in the executive branch.

3.1.3. Overview of Women State Secretaries in the Government in the Period 2014–2024

Table 6: Representation of Women State Secretaries by Years, Portfolios and by Terms of Office of the Presidents of the Government

No.	Year and President of the Government	Date of the Inaugural Session	Number of Ministries	Number of State Secretaries	Share of State Secretaries	Portfolio
1	2024 Hristijan Mickovski	23..2024	20	  2	10,0 %	MoH, MoD
2	2024 Talat Xhaferi	28.1.2024	16	0	0,0 %	
3	2022 – 2024 Dimitar Kovačevski	16.1.2022	16	     5	31,3 %	MoF, Mol, MoES, MoE
4	2020 Zoran Zaev	30.8.2020	16	 1	6,3 %	MoH
5	2020 Oliver Spasovski	3.1.2020	16	0	0,0 %	
6	2017 Zoran Zaev	31.5.2017	16	0	0,0 %	
7	2016 Emil Dimitriev	18.1.2016	14	 2	14,3 %	Mol, MoJ
8	2014 Nikola Gruevski	19.6.2014	14	    4	28,6 %	MoEPP, Mol, MoE, MoJ

In the 2014 Government, four Women State Secretaries were appointed, meaning only 28.6% of these positions were held by women compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore, the data available to us reveal that we only had 1 Woman State Secretary appointed in 2020 and 2 in 2024, which quite clearly indicates a rather discouraging decline in the role of women occupying this significant leadership position. The highest share was achieved in 2022 at 31.3%, but then dropped again to 10% in 2024.

This year-on-year fluctuation and the recurring decline in women's representation in the ranks of State Secretaries in 2024 means that progress cannot be sustained over the years. It raises some rather burning questions about the deep-rooted structural barriers that persist in the country's political state of affairs, much to the astonishment

of those advocating equality. Namely, the appointment data we have considered, which we hoped would present a more encouraging picture, point to an obvious need for comprehensive reform. This reform will also need to encompass legislation, which will give priority to gender equality. And more importantly, it will deal with certain cultural attitudes that undoubtedly influence these appointments.

Various European nations with left-wing parties in power actively promote women candidates in their programmes, which is certainly a laudable practice. But the apparent lack of sustained commitment to empowerment programmes, training, mentoring, and support systems for women could without any doubt hinder potential progress. Thus, the implementation of targeted initiatives modelled on the successful practices of

the Nordic countries could serve as a key step towards fostering an environment conducive to promoting women's leadership.

3.1.4. Women Directors of Public Health Facilities under the Jurisdiction of the Line Ministry in the period 2017–2024

In the context of the 110 public health facilities under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health (MoH), it is important to note that for 2014, 2015 and 2016, the MoH, upon request, did not provide data or statistics on the appointment of women directors of these public health facilities. Thus, a significant gap has been created in the understanding of gender representation in this critical sector of public health management. The information that was later obtained in the Ministry's response to the repeated request covers only the period from 2017 to 2024.

In terms of the data obtained, it is especially important to note that 2024 has seen the lowest share (33.6%) of women directors occupying management positions in public health facilities, while 2023 recorded the highest share of women directors – 44.5%. Then, in 2024, with the formation of the new government, women's representation has dropped to 33.6%. This share is not satisfactory, especially considering that 78.4% of people working in the public health sector are women, and that preconditions exist for satisfactory gender parity in this area.

Table 7: Percentage Representation of Women Directors in Public Health Facilities in the Period 2017–2024

110 Public Health Facilities		
Year	Women Directors	%
2014	No data	/
2015	No data	/
2016	No data	/
2017	42	38,1 %
2018	43	39,0 %
2019	39	35,4 %
2020	44	40 %
2021	45	40,9 %
2022	47	42,7 %
2023	49	44,5 %
2024	37	33,6 %



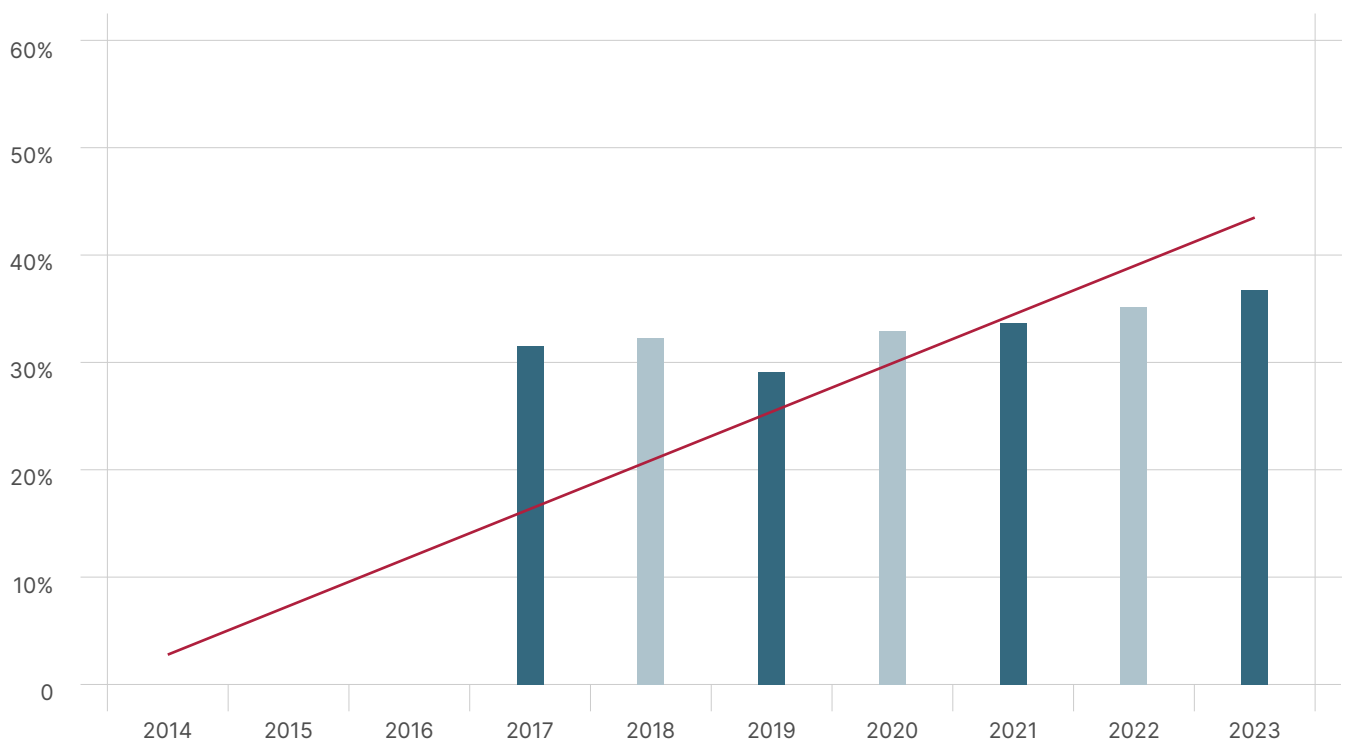
When determining the overall growth trend observed during said period, it is clear that there is a general upward trajectory in the representation of women. However, it is truly alarming to note that, rather than continuing this positive trend, the 2024 data indicate a

significant decline

in the share of women in leadership roles in public health settings, which raises serious concerns about gender equality in this area.



Chart 4: Trend in Representation of Women Directors in Public Health Facilities in the Period 2017–2024



3.2.

Local Government in the Republic of North Macedonia

Local governance is essential because it directly affects the lives of citizens, yet gender inequality persists at the local level, hindering women's effective participation in decision-making. Studies show that, although women can start their political careers at the local level, their advancement to higher positions is often stymied by systemic issues.

Студиите покажуваат дека, иако жените можат да ги започнат своите политички кариери на локално ниво, нивното напредување до повисоки функции често е запрено од системски прашања.

Recent data from Europe highlight the disparity in local political representation of women, underscoring the need for targeted efforts to improve their visibility and influence in governance. Despite these challenges, there is a growing recognition of the importance of gender equality in local governance, suggesting that improvements in representation can lead to more inclusive decision-making processes and better outcomes in local communities.

3.2.1. Overview of Women Mayors in the Period 2014–2024

In the time frame of the survey, which stretches from 2014 to 2024, the number of women mayors is significantly low. Namely, in the period 2014–2016, only 4 women mayors were elected in 80 municipalities¹⁹, or 5% women at the local government level throughout the country. The elected women mayors are from the municipalities of Bogdanci, Gradsko, Kisela Voda and Tetovo.

Then, in the period between 2017 and 2020, a total of 6 women mayors were recorded within a total of 80 municipalities, or 8%, marking a period of official term of office of four years in different municipalities, namely: Aračinovo, Bitola, Makedonska Kamenica, Mogila, Staro Nagoričane and Tetovo.

In the most recent local election process, the outcome was only 2 elected mayors, namely in the City of Skopje and in Staro Nagoričane, or 3%, which raises significant questions about the representation of women in leadership positions at the local level. These data are given in the following table.

¹⁹ The administrative division of North Macedonia has changed several times since 1996. Between 1996 and 2004, Macedonia had 123 municipalities. In August 2004, their number was reduced to 84, and with the last administrative division in 2013, the number was further reduced to 80. Thus, some municipalities remained unchanged, and some were merged with larger municipalities. In 2013, after the local elections on 24 March, the municipalities of Drugovo, Vraneštica, Zajas and Oslomej ceased to exist and were merged into Kičevo. The number of municipalities was reduced from 84 to 80.

Table 8: Representation of Women Mayors by Years and by Municipalities

Period	Number of Municipalities	Number of Women Mayors	Share of Women Mayors	Municipalities
2014 – 2016	80	 4	5 %	Bogdanci, Gradsko, Kisela Voda, Tetovo
2017 – 2020	80	 6	8 %	Aračinovo, Bitola, Makedonska Kamenica, Mogila, Staro Nagoričane, Tetovo
2021 – 2024	80	 2	3 %	City of Skopje, Staro Nagoričane

The statistical representation of women as mayors has been a meagre figure over a ten-year period, which serves to highlight an alarming trend and their extremely low involvement in local government. The representation of women in local government in our country continues to pose a huge challenge characterised by a number of significant barriers, which require thorough examination and joint efforts to address. In particular, the representation of women in local government remains significantly low, possibly influenced by various socio-cultural factors. These factors stem from patriarchal mentality, education, and economic challenges and limit women's political engagement at the local level.

The chart below can serve as an illustration reflecting the share of women and men running for mayoral office, with women being represented in much higher numbers. The data are presented in the following chart.

Chart 5: Number of Women Candidates in Local Elections²⁰



Apparently women run in relatively large numbers in local elections, but fail to be elected in a more significant number. We could conclude that, although local government is crucial because it directly affects the lives of citizens, gender inequality persists, hindering women’s effective participation in decision-making. According to the Council of Europe, the promotion of gender equality is of paramount importance for the functioning of a healthy democracy, which has consequently resulted in increased scrutiny of the mechanisms through which women can gain access to political power at the local level.²¹

In addition, empirical research suggests that municipalities often fail to align with national policies advocating gender equality, thus pointing to a significant gap between the functioning of local self-governments and overarching goals aimed at achieving gender equality in a broader context²². In short, although there is evidence of progress made in the pursuit of gender equality, achieving true parity in local governance remains a complex and ongoing challenge that must be systematically addressed.

20 Source: Жените и мажите во Република Северна Македонија, 2023. https://www.stat.gov.mk/publikacii/2023/ZeniteMazite_2023.pdf.

21 Hlynsdóttir, Gender and representation in local politics, 2023. <https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollchap-oa/book/9781800371200/book-part-9781800371200-19.xml>.

22 Jenn Williamson, Minimum Standards for Mainstreaming Gender Equality, 2010 (Page 2). <https://www.fhi360.org/wp-content/uploads/drupal/documents/minimum-standards-mainstreaming-gender-equality.pdf>

3.3.

Overview of Women in Leadership Positions in Administration and in the Public Sector under the Jurisdiction of Municipalities

3.3.1. Women Directors of Public Institutions in the Field of Culture in the Period 2014–2024

The empirical data supporting this study were meticulously collected from a total of 75 municipalities, which constitutes a significant subset of the total number of municipalities in the jurisdiction of the entire state, which consists of 80 municipalities. This means that we have an outstanding participation rate of 95% of municipalities that responded with publicly available information relevant to the subject of this analysis. However, no data on the tenures of the directors of these public institutions have been obtained, so to avoid the possibility of overlapping figures over the years, the data is observed as a total figure or as a share per year.

There are a total of 128 public institutions within the domain of local government, which are exclusively dedicated to the promotion and development of the cultural sector (such as folk theatres, cultural homes, libraries, etc.). Of the information received on women directors within the ten-year period, the number ranges from 5 to 9 women directors in 128 cultural public institutions per year, or from 3.9% to 7%. The data are given in the following table.

If we analyse the trend over the years, we can note a certain increase in the representation of women occupying managerial roles in public institutions in the cultural sector, especially evident in the period 2019–2020. The increase, albeit minimal, marks a recurring slight decline after 2020, which is a significant concern overall.

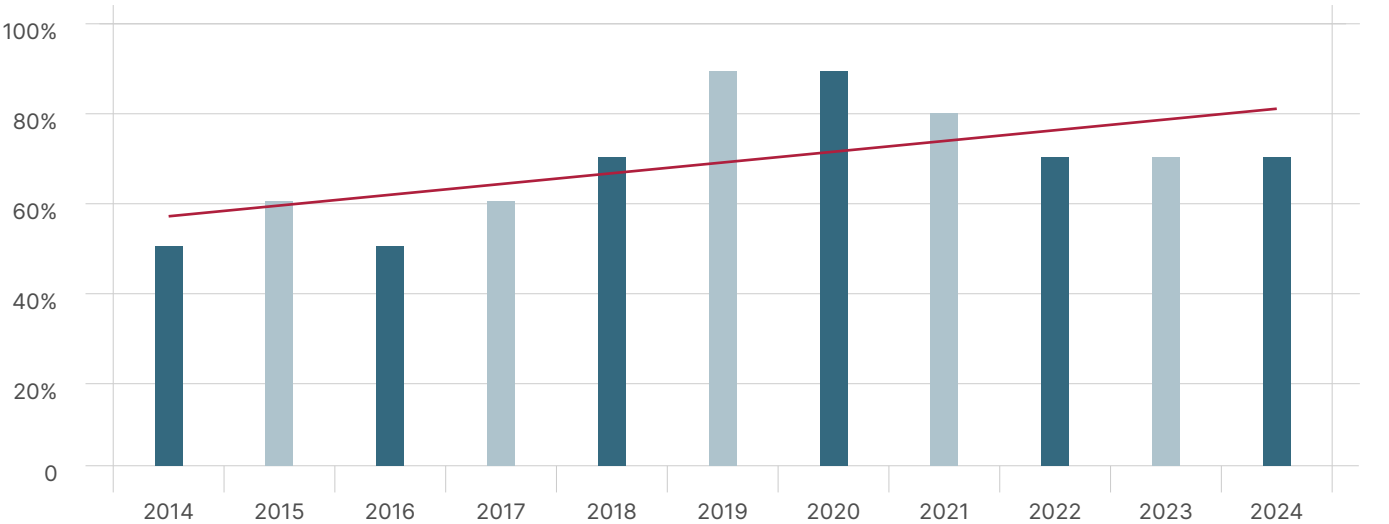
The line of this minimal increase and decrease can be seen in the following chart.

However, we can conclude that the participation of women in leadership positions in the field of culture at the local level is expressed in single digits and a share of 7% or less, which does not reflect gender equality at all. Especially since the number of employed women in the field of culture is almost equal to the number of men. Obviously, even where women are sufficiently represented, they fail to make breakthroughs to leadership positions.

Table 9: Representation of Women Directors of Public Institutions in the Field of Culture in the Period 2014–2024

128 Cultural Public Institutions		
Year	Women Directors	%
2014	 5	3,9
2015	 6	4,7
2016	 5	3,9
2017	 6	4,7
2018	 7	5,5
2019	 9	7
2020	 9	7
2021	 8	6,2
2022	 7	5,5
2023	 7	5,5
2024	 7	5,5

Chart 6: Trend in Representation of Women Directors in Local-Level Cultural Institutions in the Period 2014–2024



3.3.2. Women Directors in the Field of Education – Municipal Primary Schools – in the Period 2014–2024

Of the comprehensive 232 municipal primary schools, it is documented that women were appointed as directors at a rate of 30% in 2016, up to 38.7% in 2022. The data indicate a higher representation of women directors within the education sector, as opposed to cultural institutions, where they are 3-4 times less represented (although both are appointed by the local self-governments). These data are given in the following table.

As for the trend, it has remained almost unchanged over the years, with a slight increase in women directors in the municipal primary schools, culminating in the highest recorded figure of 38.7% in 2022. This share is the highest in the

country when it comes to the representation of women in senior management positions.

Of course, this share has the potential for further growth to the point of full gender parity, especially given that the number of employed women in primary education is higher than the number of men at 66.1%. Obviously, despite the large presence of women in the sector, men as directors are represented by about 67-70%, while women directors by about 30-33% on average. The situation can again be attributed to a variety of systemic issues, possibly related to stereotypes and prejudices about women in leadership positions, as well as perceptions of women's opportunities and abilities to lead.

Table 10: Representation of Women Directors in Municipal Primary Schools in the Period 2014–2024

232 Municipal Primary Schools		
Year	Women Directors	%
2014	 72	31
2015	 71	30
2016	 70	30,1
2017	 75	32,3
2018	 76	32,7
2019	 74	31,8
2020	 75	32,3
2021	 77	33,2
2022	 90	38,7
2023	 80	34,5
2024	 78	33,6

In other words, for every 10 people employed in primary schools, there are about 7 employed women and 3 employed men. However, the ratio is reversed when it comes to managing these institutions.

Thus, in 10 primary schools, there are

7 men

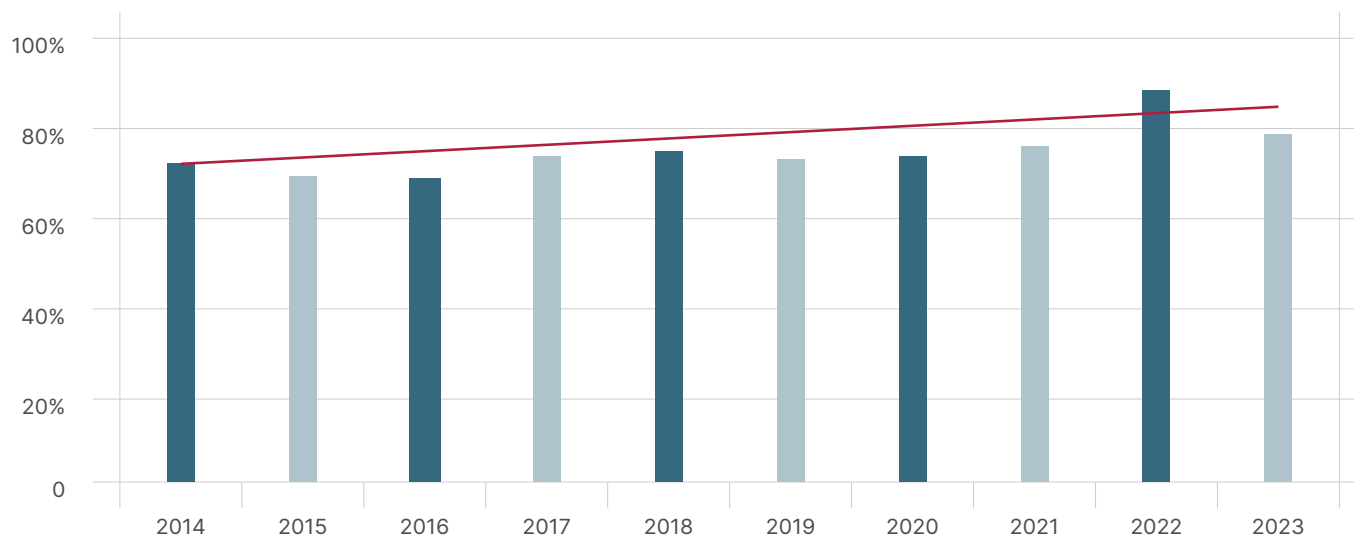
appointed as directors, while only

3 women

are appointed as directors.

This persistent underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in the education sector not only reflects broader societal norms but also raises concerns about the implications for education policy and practice. Notably, research shows that women directors often bring unique perspectives and management styles to their roles, emphasising collaboration and emotional intelligence, which can positively impact school culture and student outcomes.²³ Without initiatives aimed at removing barriers to equal participation and fostering an inclusive atmosphere, even perceived progress can stagnate, which may ultimately hamper the potential for transformative leadership in schools across our country.

Chart 7: Trend in Representation of Women Directors in the Field of Education – Municipal Primary Schools – in the Period 2017–2024



²³ Vassiliki Brinia, Men vs women; educational leadership in primary schools in Greece: an empirical study, 2013. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241674734_Men_vs_women_educational_leadership_in_primary_schools_in_Greece_An_empirical_study

3.3.3. Women Directors in the Field of Education – Municipal Secondary Schools – in the period 2014–2024

In terms of women in leadership positions in municipal secondary schools, the lowest share was recorded between 2014 and 2016 – 6.9%; and the highest at 12.4% in 2023. However, these figures do not meet the gender representation of women in municipal secondary schools, especially considering that women in secondary education make up 58.6% of all educators. Although the representation of women as educators is approaching almost 60%, the share of women directors has not exceeded 12.4% over a decade.

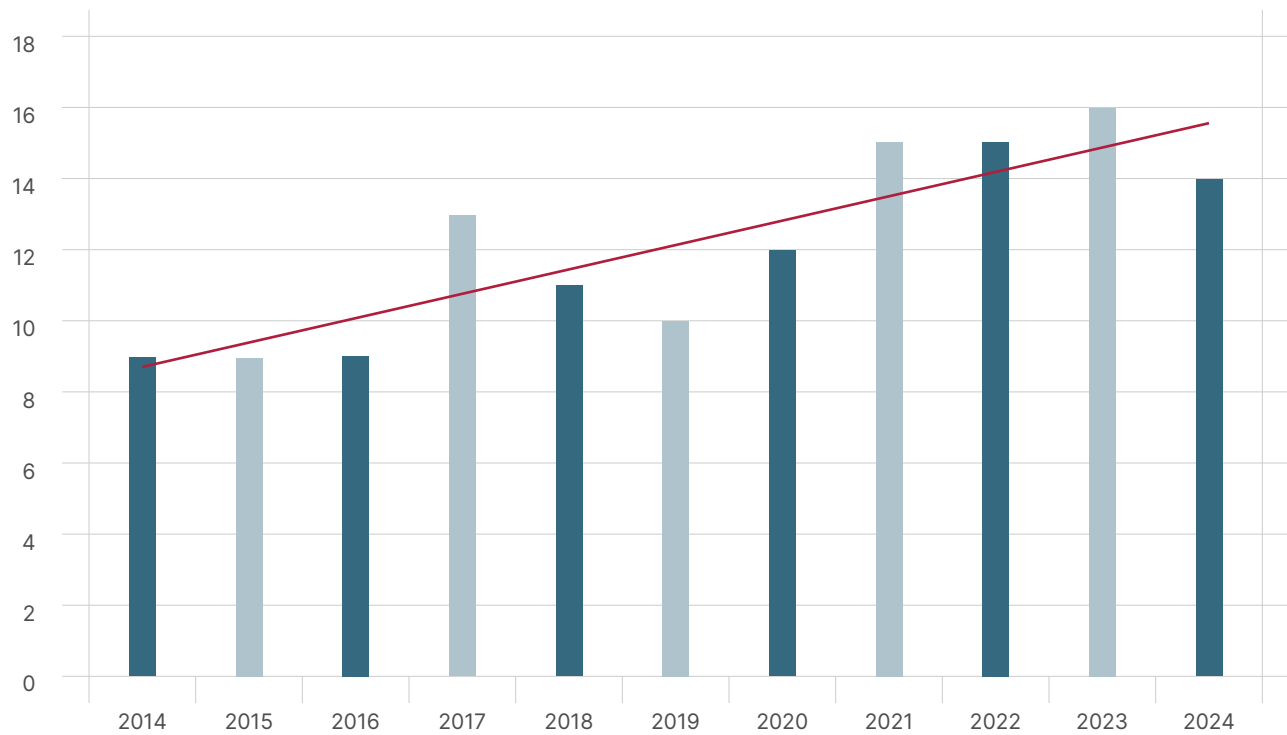
The representation data for the last ten years is presented in the following table.

The trend of women directors in municipal secondary schools increased minimally between 2014 and 2023 and ranged within the boundaries of a statistical error each successive year. Considering that there are a total of 129 secondary schools in the entire country, of which 35 are under the jurisdiction of the City of Skopje, it can be seen that the share of women directors is very small compared to men directors.

Table 11: Representation of Women Directors in Municipal Secondary Schools in the Period 2014–2024

129 Secondary Schools		
Year	Women Directors	%
2014	 9	6,9
2015	 9	6,9
2016	 9	6,9
2017	 13	10
2018	 11	8,5
2019	 10	7,7
2020	 12	9,3
2021	 15	11,6
2022	 15	11,6
2023	 16	12,4
2024	 14	10,8

Chart 8: Trend in Representation of Women Directors in the Field of Education – Municipal Secondary Schools – in the Period 2017–2024



In conclusion, we could state that, without targeted initiatives to remove barriers to entry for women in leadership positions in secondary education and with minimal progress in a full decade, we risk hindering the potential for transformative leadership in schools. This requires a concerted effort by policymakers, educational institutions, and mayors to create an environment that fosters women's leadership. Studies show that women-led schools often exhibit a more collaborative and inclusive management style, which can improve teacher morale and student engagement. As such, increasing women representation in secondary school leadership can contribute to a more inclusive and equitable education system in which different perspectives guide decision-making processes.

Furthermore, addressing this imbalance requires systemic change, including mentoring programmes specifically designed for aspiring women leaders in society more broadly, as well as policy reforms that actively promote gender equality in the education sector. By fostering an environment that values and supports women in leadership positions in education, we can pave the way for a future generation of leaders and educators who will actively strive to contribute to creating a more inclusive and equitable environment for all.

The following could be specified as reasons for the low representation of women in leadership positions in the education sector:

Sexism and gender bias:

Negative perceptions of women directors are pervasive, often rooted in sexist attitudes that undermine their authority. Prejudice from the environment further exacerbates these issues, leading to a kind of negative discrimination when it comes to the appointment and selection of women to leadership positions.

Administrative and socio-economic barriers:

Administrative challenges, such as insufficient support and resources, hinder women's access to leadership positions.

Socio-economic factors, including traditional gender roles, limit women's opportunities to advance in education.

Educational segregation: Increased segregation in education among ethnic groups in Republic of North Macedonia may also contribute to a decrease in the number of women directors, as it affects the overall setup of school administration.

Despite these challenges, some argue that a focus on quality in school leadership could pave the way for more inclusive practices, potentially improving the situation for women directors in the future

3.3.4. omen Directors in the Field of Social Protection – Public Childcare Facilities (PCCF) – Kindergartens in the Period 2014–2024

Since 2014, we have seen a mild but steady growing trend of women directors in public childcare facilities – kindergartens. The share is on the rise, with the exception of the years 2017 and 2020. According to the State Statistical Office, there are a total of 77 state-run public institutions for children in the Republic of North Macedonia. In terms of the percentage representation of women directors by years, it can be seen that the highest share was in the period 2022 to 2024, and the lowest share was in 2014. More detailed data are given in the table below.

The upward trend has been constant and over a ten-year period it has almost doubled, from 18.8% to 38.9%. This numerical increase in women

managers of public childcare facilities may reflect broader trends observed globally, where women have made significant advances in educational managerial roles. The smaller number of male employees from which to appoint and select the incumbents for the managerial positions may also play a role in this increase.

However, despite these achievements at the level of preschool education, challenges for women in leadership positions in education remain; their representation in senior management positions often lags behind their male counterparts due to persistent prejudices and systemic barriers that hinder their progress.²⁴ For example, while women may excel in acquiring the qualifications necessary for these roles, the transition from middle management to executive positions remains disproportionately difficult, echoing patterns observed in various sectors, such as corporate and government institutions.

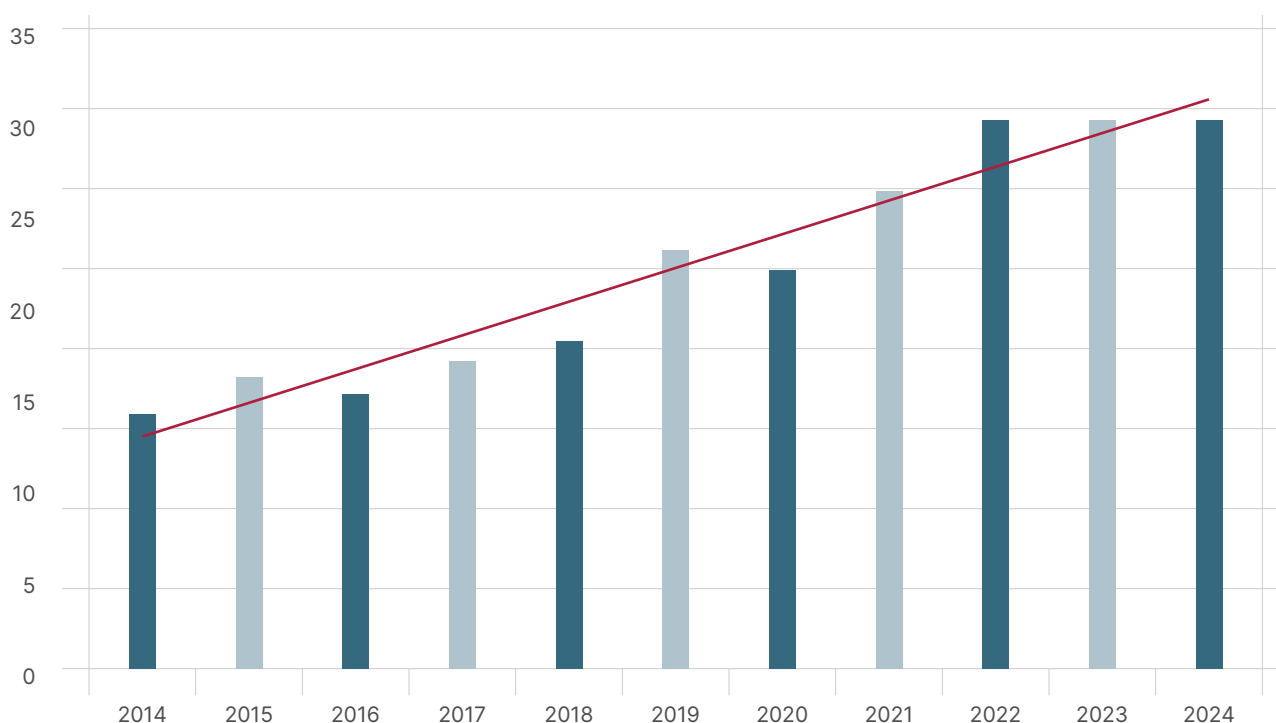
24 Sofia Calsy, *Women in Public Administration in the United States: Leadership, Gender Stereotypes, and Bias*, 2021. https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1404&context=jj_pubs

Table 12: Percentage Representation of Women Directors in PCCF in the Period 2014–2024

77 PCCF

Year	Women Directors	%
2014	 14	18,8
2015	 16	20,7
2016	 15	19,4
2017	 17	22
2018	 18	23,3
2019	 23	29,8
2020	 22	28,5
2021	 23	33,7
2022	 30	38,9
2023	 30	38,9
2024	 30	38,9

Chart 9: Trend in Representation of Women Directors in the Field of Social Protection – PCCF Kindergartens – in the Period 2014–2024



As the state's education system evolves further, it will be crucial to address these fundamental issues to ensure that the gains made are not only sustained but also expanded, fostering a more equitable environment for future generations of leaders.²⁵ First, the gradual abolition of patriarchal norms fostered a more equitable environment for women by allowing them to take on leadership roles in early childhood education (Шоповски 2014). Second, research suggests that women exhibit superior leadership qualities, such as democratic and participatory styles, which increase their effectiveness in educational settings (Kusnawawati 2022). Additionally, the legal framework that promotes gender equality has been instrumental in supporting the advancement of women in the workforce (Шоповски 2014). Furthermore, the increased recognition of women's abilities in leadership roles has led to a shift in societal perceptions, encouraging more women to hold executive positions (Bundaleska and Mileva, 2023). Finally, evolving labour market dynamics have created more opportunities for women, despite existing differences (Блажевски 2017).

Conversely, while progress is evident, challenges remain, including persistent gender differences in career advancement and systemic biases that may hinder women's full participation in leadership roles (Maranto et al. 2017).

3.3.5. Women Directors in Public Enterprises Established by Municipalities in the Period 2014–2024

According to the comprehensive records of the MoIOA register, it has been established that a total of 159 public enterprises are under the jurisdiction of different municipalities throughout the region. With regard to these public enterprises, data on the total number of women in leadership positions have been obtained from municipalities at the local level. However, given that no data have been obtained for the duration of their term of office, and due to possible overlap in several consecutive years, they are presented as annual shares. This image of the state of affairs allows for accuracy of the data shown.

When reviewing the percentage representation of women directors in public enterprises, the lowest share recorded is a meagre 1.9% and was documented in 2014 (with the same share recorded again in 2016). Conversely, the highest percentage representation was recorded in 2022, when it reached 8.8% and 8.2% in 2024.

25 Hindy Lauer Schachter, *Women in Public Administration: Giving Gender a Place in Education for Leadership*, 2015. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0095399715611173?journalCode=aasb>

The calculated linear trend analysis indicates a slight upline of

1,9 % to 8,2 %

over the years. This gradual increase in women's representation can be interpreted as indicative of evolving attitudes towards the issue of gender equality in public enterprises. However, even with the increase, the share of women is reduced to single digits, which is far below the benchmarks for gender equality and far below some of the positive experiences found in developed countries.

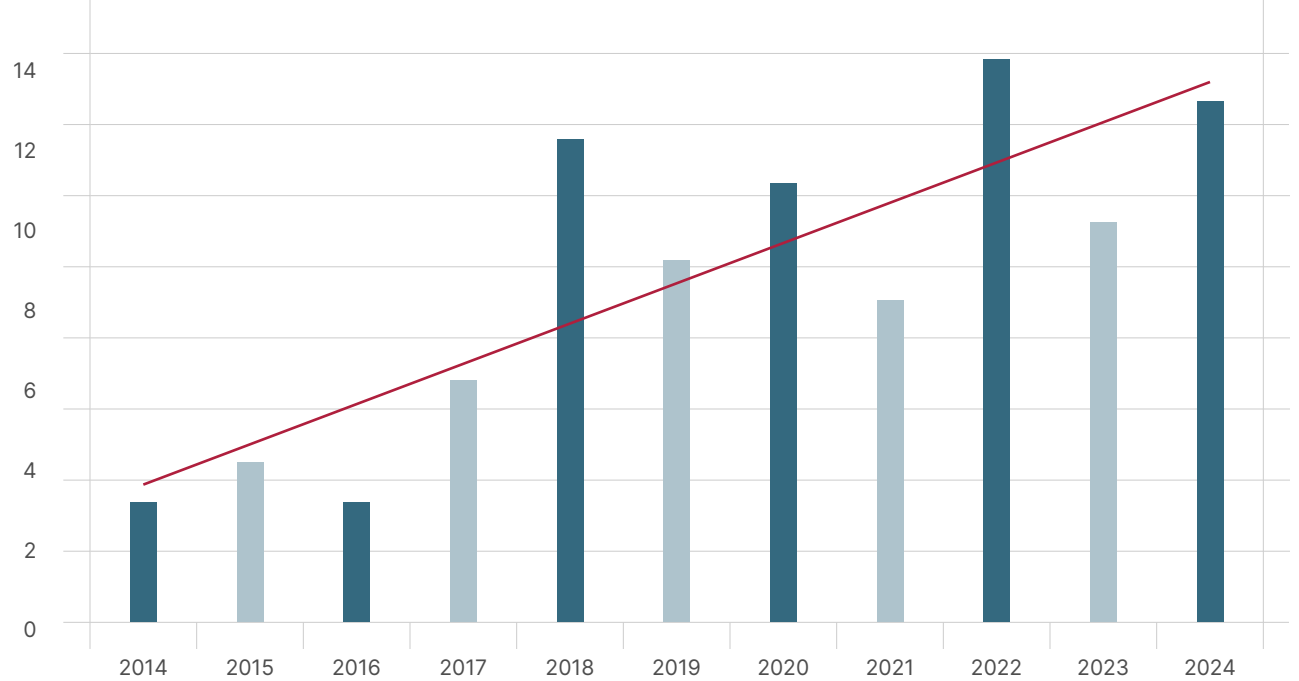


Table 13: Percentage Representation of Women Directors in Public Enterprises on an Annual Basis in the Period 2014–202

159 Public Enterprises

Year	Women Directors	%
2014	 3	1,9
2015	 4	2,5
2016	 3	1,9
2017	 6	3,8
2018	 12	7,5
2019	 9	5,6
2020	 11	7
2021	 8	5
2022	 14	8,8
2023	 10	6,3
2024	 13	8,2

Chart 10: Trend in Representation of Women Directors in Public Enterprises Established by Municipalities in the Period 2014–2024

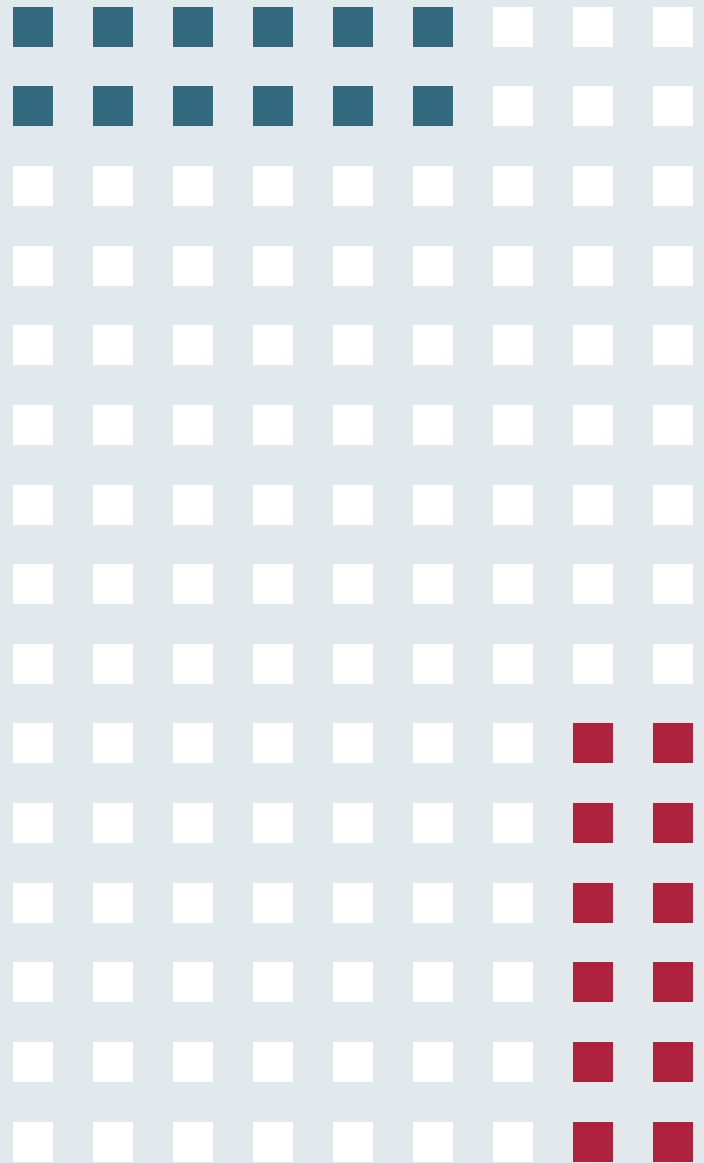


It is worth noting that this represents some minimal progress in the area of gender representation in some of the areas and sectors where men have traditionally been employed. However, the data indicate a significant disparity, which requires comprehensive strategies and interventions to advance women’s leadership roles in public services and utilities at the local level.

Furthermore, as highlighted in studies on gender representation in administrative positions, there is an urgent need for systemic changes that promote equality and support the advancement of women in these sectors and activities. This includes changes in education and career development, which will stimulate girls’ participation in sectors and activities in the field of engineering and industry, as well as in service-oriented facilities in the field of public services and utilities (water supply, municipal waste, firefighting, etc.).



4



Qualitative Analysis

4.1.

Focus Group Findings and Data

The focus groups conducted as part of the analysis revealed some important insights regarding the experiences of women in leadership positions in the Republic of North Macedonia.

Attached are the key findings organised in the table below.

All of these findings highlight the complex interplay of challenges and opportunities faced by women in leadership positions, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to improve their participation in executive and other leadership positions in administration and in the public sector.

Considered Areas	Findings and Data
 Barriers and gender prejudices for women's role in society	These challenges include systemic gender bias in society and the public, a lack of support from male colleagues, and insufficient mentoring opportunities as part of appraisal and advancement in service. Such barriers reflect a broader trend in society regarding women's participation in politics and leadership. Many women encounter disapproval in the environment in which they live and work.
 Perception of less ability to manage	Some women reported that their ability is often questioned compared to those of their male colleagues, which can undermine their self-confidence and effectiveness in performing leadership roles. This understanding is a significant barrier that needs to be overcome in order to foster a more equitable and supportive environment in the institutions in which women perform these functions, as well as in society more broadly.
 Influence of management styles	Focus group statements showed that women in leadership often emphasised participatory leadership styles, emphasising empathy and collaboration. According to them, this approach not only fosters a supportive work environment but also improves collective relationships and decision-making processes. However, in practice they often do not have the opportunity or the time to apply this type of leadership, nor do they find approval in the wider and narrower work environment.



Positive role models and examples of women in politics and governance

Women in leadership positions serve as role models who positively influence the political engagement of other women.

Their presence in senior management positions encourages more women to participate in political processes, such as voting and party membership, but also increased commitment to advancement in the service in their narrower and wider work environment.



Need for structural reforms

Women participants stressed the need for comprehensive structural reforms to promote gender equality in appointment to senior management positions and advancement in the service. In this context, quotas for senior civil service management are mentioned, but also other positive action measures for women in career advancement and mobility. And also, support through organised training and practice.

They stressed that, without such systemic changes, including policies that support work-life balance, campaigns to overcome gender stereotypes, etc., progress will be limited.



Organised support networks

The focus groups stressed the importance of establishing support networks among women in leadership positions.

These networks can provide mentorship, share experiences, and create a sense of community, which is vital for overcoming the challenges faced by women in leadership positions, especially in environments where there are more men employed.



4.2.

Findings from the Conducted Survey and the Experience-Sharing Questionnaire on Holding Senior Management Positions

As an integral part of the analysis, a questionnaire was prepared to provide insights into experiences related to the role of women in senior management positions. In the end, the questionnaire provided data characterised by qualitative and historical depth that exceeded what any numerical representation could convey.

These rich qualitative data not only serve to illuminate the complex and nuanced experiences of individuals occupying senior management positions, but also highlights the multi-layered and complex interplay that exists between different management styles and the organisational outcomes that result from such a relationship.

As institutions continue to evolve and thrive, it is increasingly recognised in the academic and professional communities that effective governance requires leaders who have the capacity to tailor their roles in a way that aligns with established strategic goals and immediate operational requirements. The level of adaptability indicates that modern management education and training programmes should include not only solid theoretical frameworks but also experiential learning opportunities. Experiential learning and practice address critical gaps that are perceived throughout management, where instances of misalignment often culminate in various dysfunctional states of affairs and inefficiencies in

the team. By actively fostering an organisational environment that prioritises and values sharing of experiences, institutions can effectively nurture a new generation of leaders and executives who are equipped to address the multi-layered and complex challenges of ongoing operations.

In this context, this questionnaire was also drafted, which asked respondents to share their views and experiences during the management and execution of leadership roles. They were also asked to share the biggest problems and challenges at work, as well as to make appropriate suggestions that could improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the management. The questionnaire was set up as a Google form and shared online with an expanded list of current and former Ministers, Deputy Ministers, State Secretaries, Mayors, as well as Directors of state institutions and public institutions. The questionnaire was completed by 25 representatives from this diverse group.

4.2.1. Description of the Sample (by Type of Office Held, Term in Office, and Method of Appointment or Selection)

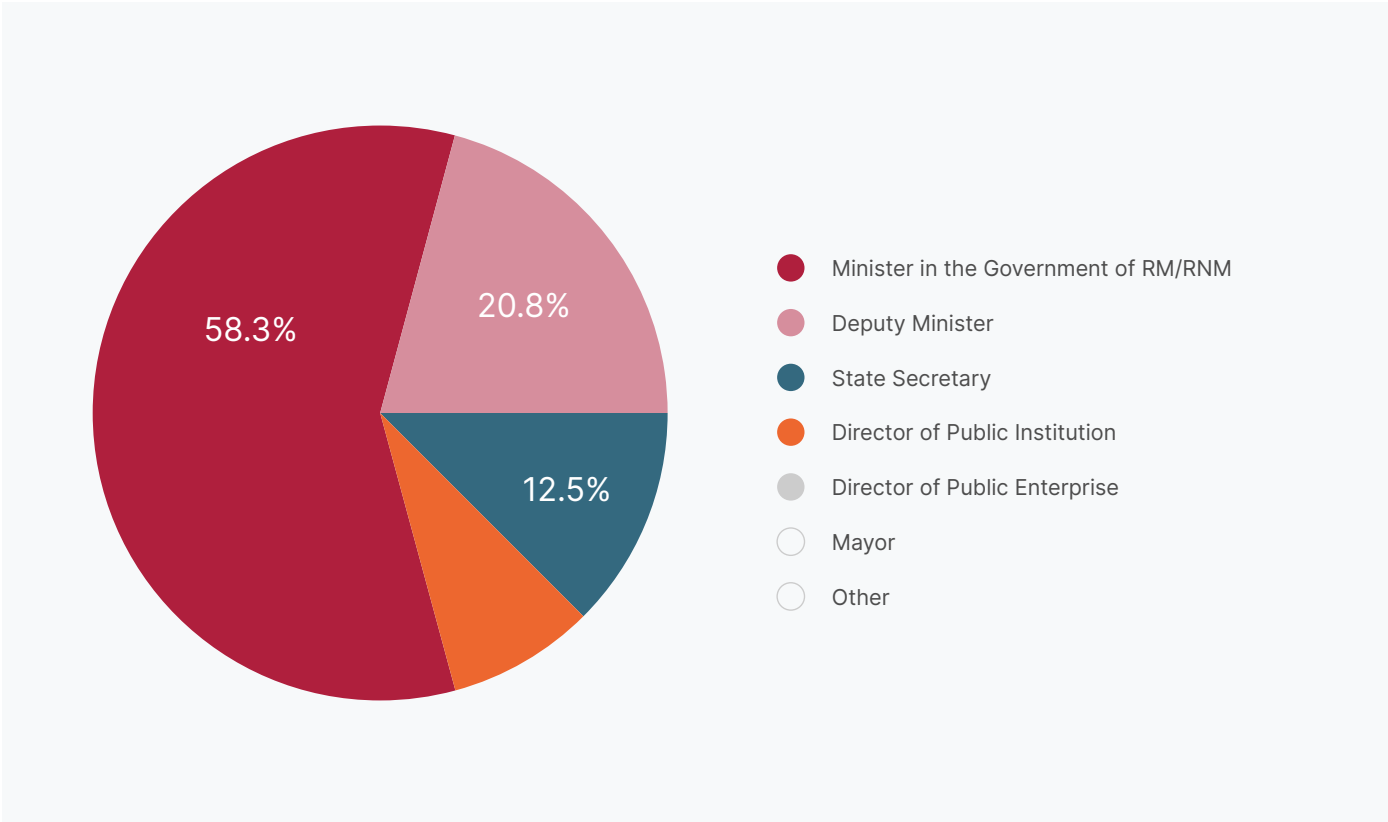
Women respondents were first asked to answer the question of **which executive or senior management position they had held or were still holding** from those specified below. In case some

of them had held multiple positions, they were asked to indicate the highest position they held. In terms of answers, the largest number of the sample included women directors of public institutions – with 58.3% of respondents. Then followed other women directors in senior management positions in administration, with about 20.8%; with 12.5% of women ministers coming next; and the lowest number of those answering the questionnaire included women state secretaries. Only one woman respondent left this question unanswered. The answers received are presented in the figure below.

Although the sample of 25 respondents is small, the proportion of completed questionnaires from all types of leadership roles resulted in a satisfactory picture of women ministers, women state secretaries, women directors of public institutions, and women directors of public enterprises. There were no replies from women deputy ministers and women mayors, although the



Figure 1: Share of Women Respondents by Type of Senior Management Position Held



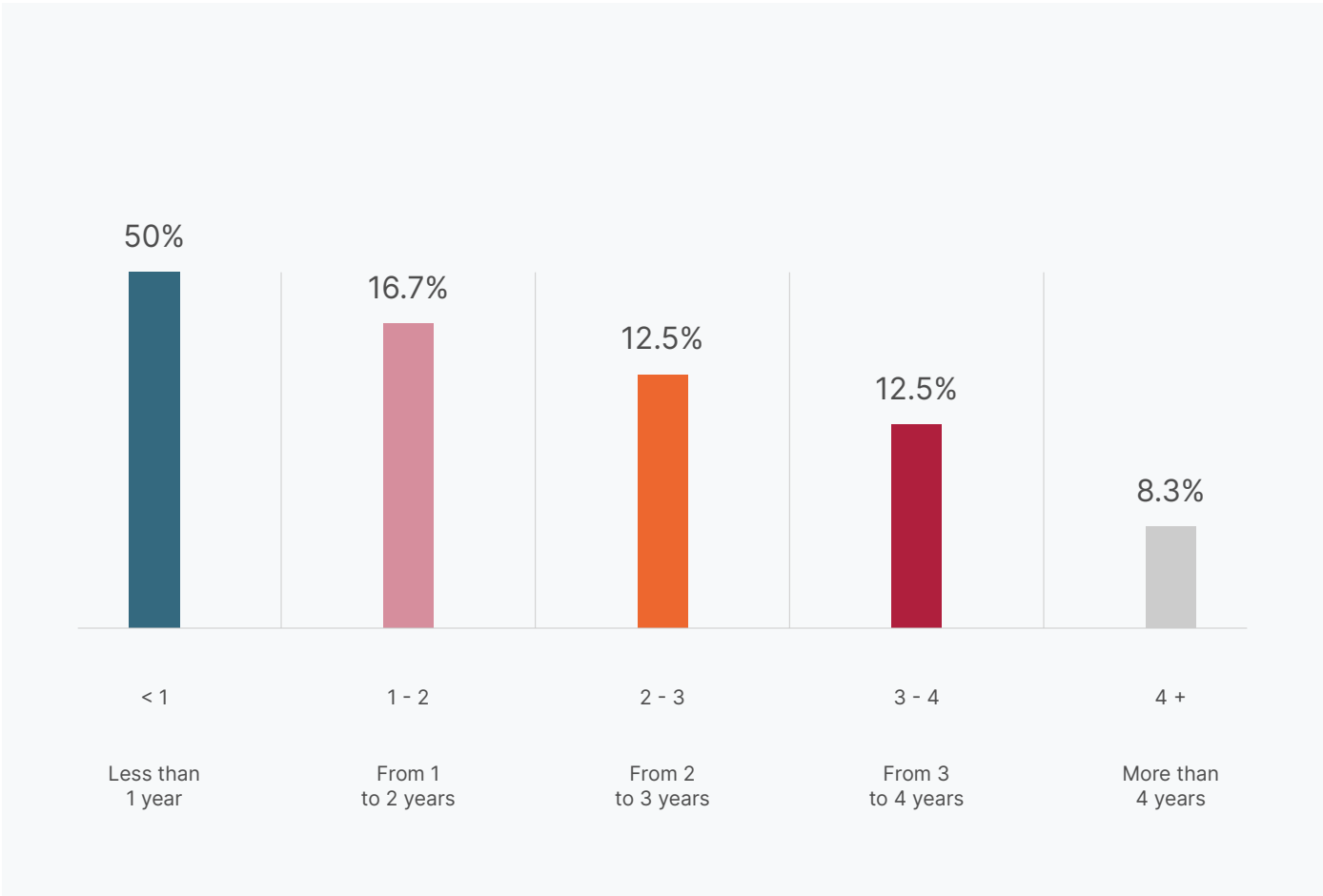
link to the questionnaire was duly sent to several of them.

With **regard to the term spent in office**, the answers were distributed as follows.

When asked how long they had been in the specified position, a remarkable 50% of respondents indicated that they had fulfilled the responsibilities associated with the specified role for more than four years. Furthermore, 16.7% of the participants reported having been in this role for three to four years, which is about 66.7% of those who had been in office for more than three years. An identical proportion of respondents, or specifically 12.5%, indicated that their term of office in the specified position lasted two to three years, and the same share had served one to two years. The lowest proportion of respondents, at just 8.3%, had been in the specified role for less than a year.

Based on the length of their terms, it can reasonably be concluded that they have gained sufficient experience in their roles, and thus have had the necessary knowledge to provide valid and reliable answers and conclusions. Accordingly, we can consider that the largest share consists of those respondents who have had a sufficiently long term of office and the ability to recognise and understand the multi-layered challenges that accompany the position, as well as to make valuable recommendations for empowering women in leadership positions.

Figure 2: How Long Was Your Term in the Specified Office

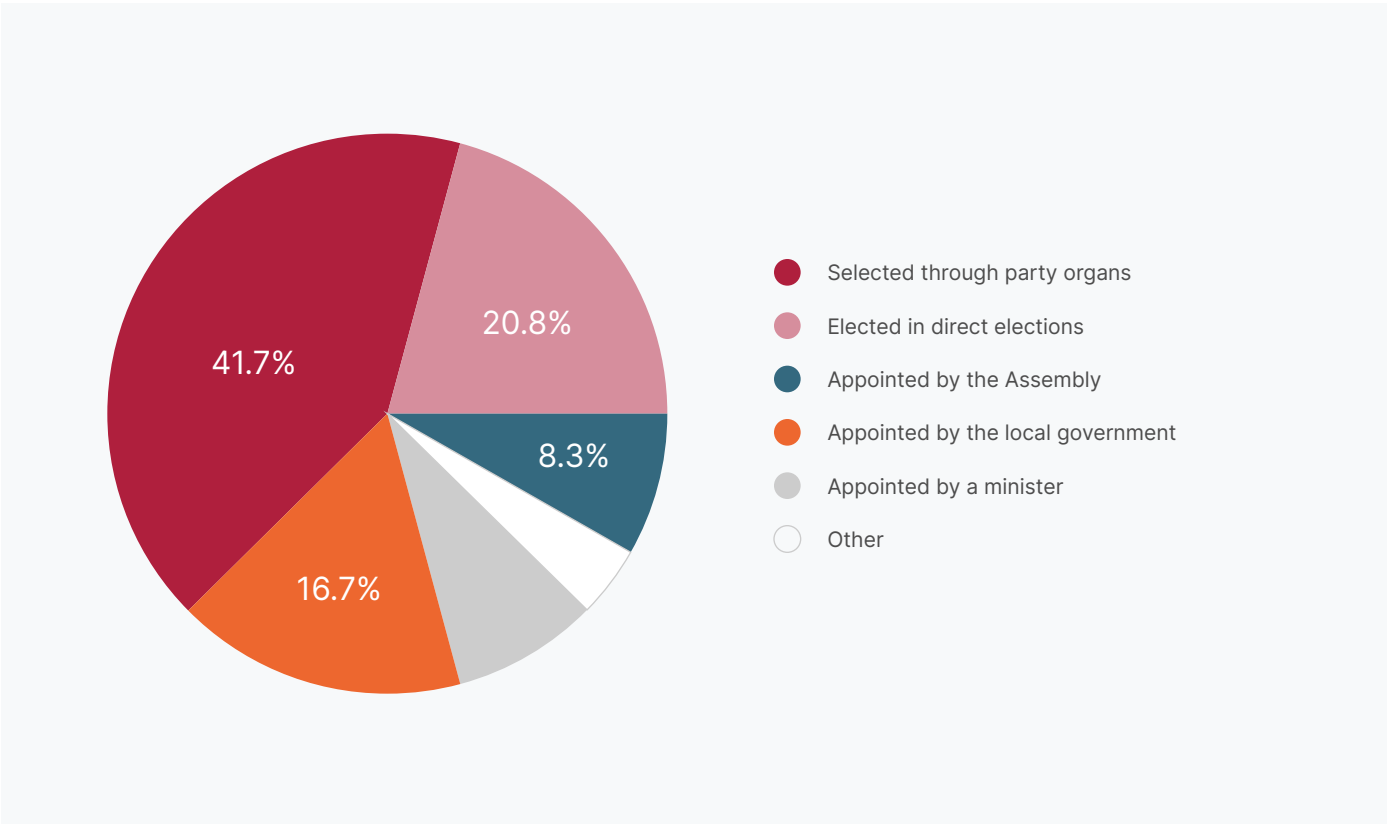


4.2.2 Method of Selection and Appointment to the Specified Positions

When asked how they were proposed or selected to said positions, the largest number of women (41.7%) had been selected by the line ministry (as part of nominations or appointments by relevant ministers). This was followed by appointments and selections in other ways, or appointments through local government at 16.7%. Apparently, with a vast majority of 80%, dominant are appointments made through political structures at the central or local level, or through political party organs. In this way, appointment or selection to a leadership role was not a political arrangement simply because of the

selection method, that is, according to the fact that it was a political body that made the appointment. On the contrary, the core problem is that the process is not competitive to find the best candidates for a given position, and the selection decision depends primarily on the opinion and the will of the party organs and political bodies and structures (regardless of whether the person in question is the best candidate, male or female, for that position).

Figure 3: Method of Selection and Appointment to the Specified Positions



The same conclusion was basically reached by the study “Who governs there?” prepared by the Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” in 2020²⁶ – which noted:

“The analysis looks at the nominations and appointments of leadership structures after the 2020 parliamentary elections. The management structures we observed represent the heads of agencies, administrations, enterprises or units within ministries appointed by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. This structure represents a zone between political appointments, such as ministers and deputies, and the civil service. This structure is politically appointed, when in fact should be selected based on professional standards and competencies. It reaffirms the commitment contained in the Proposed Law on the Senior Management in Civil Service, which provides for a selection based on the knowledge and skills of candidates and thus, at least in theory, shifts the process from its innate political background – appointment.”

Personal Perception of What Was Crucial in Their Selection or Appointment

When women respondents were asked what was crucial to their selection or appointment, the following answers prevailed, which were categorised into the following three major groups (which absorb the bulk of the originally listed answers).



26 <https://idscs.org.mk/mk/2021/04/27/%d0%ba%d0%be%d1%98-%d1%82%d0%be%d0%b0-%d1%82%d0%b0%d0%bc%d1%83-%d1%83%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%b2%d1%83%d0%b2%d0%b0/>

Table 15: Categories of Responses Related to the Reasons for Appointment and Selection

		
Education and Qualifications	Work Experience and Competencies	Character Traits
• The quality and relevance of their education • Formal education in management • Expertise in the field • Knowledge and professional qualification	• Years of work experience • Proven competency in the relevant field • The effectiveness of the programmes they were previously involved in • Professional experience gained over time	• The desire for progress (personal pursuit) • Professionalism and integrity • Vigor and non-corruption • Honesty, responsibility, authority, and integrity

Additionally, some of the respondents provided answers that emphasised the importance of showing their political will for change, the level of trust and party support they had received for the realisation of certain goals and issues, etc. They believe that it is the latter reasons that have greatly contributed to the assessment of their suitability for the roles and functions in question.

4.2.3. Initial Challenges Faced when Assuming the Position

When asked what were the first challenges they faced in taking on a leadership position, a significant proportion of respondents indicated a long list of challenges of different nature and of varying scope. All these challenges can be categorised by areas and segments of management in the following table.



Managing time and resources in the institution

- Insufficient financial resources
- Unfulfilled obligations from predecessors
- Lack of new equipment and means of operation
- Constant time pressure at work
- Rationalisation of resources, increased workload and ensuring inflow of own funds
- Managing the resources available to the institution

Human resources management

- Adapting to the new collective
- Selecting a collaboration team
- Fostering a sense of belonging among employees
- Activation of all employees
- Building trust and collaboration at all levels
- Reduced number of qualified personnel
- Shortage of professional staff – plan, strategy and implementation to strengthen the professional staff

Regulating legal matters that are lacking in the institution

- Taking on and resolving legal obstacles at work
- Ignorance of the law
- Drafting regulations that help the day-to-day functioning of the institution

Improving the quality of work

- Bringing health services closer to your place of residence
- Coordination and timely response to cases
- Fostering new activities for which there is capacity in the institution
- Raising the authority of the institution to a higher level
- Improving processes at all levels
- Establishing order and discipline in the institution and achieving rapid and visible results

Crisis management

- Institutional disorder and disrespect in almost all segments
- Dealing with the Covid crisis
- Mitigating the energy and economic crisis affecting people's living standard

Dealing with external/internal threats and pressures

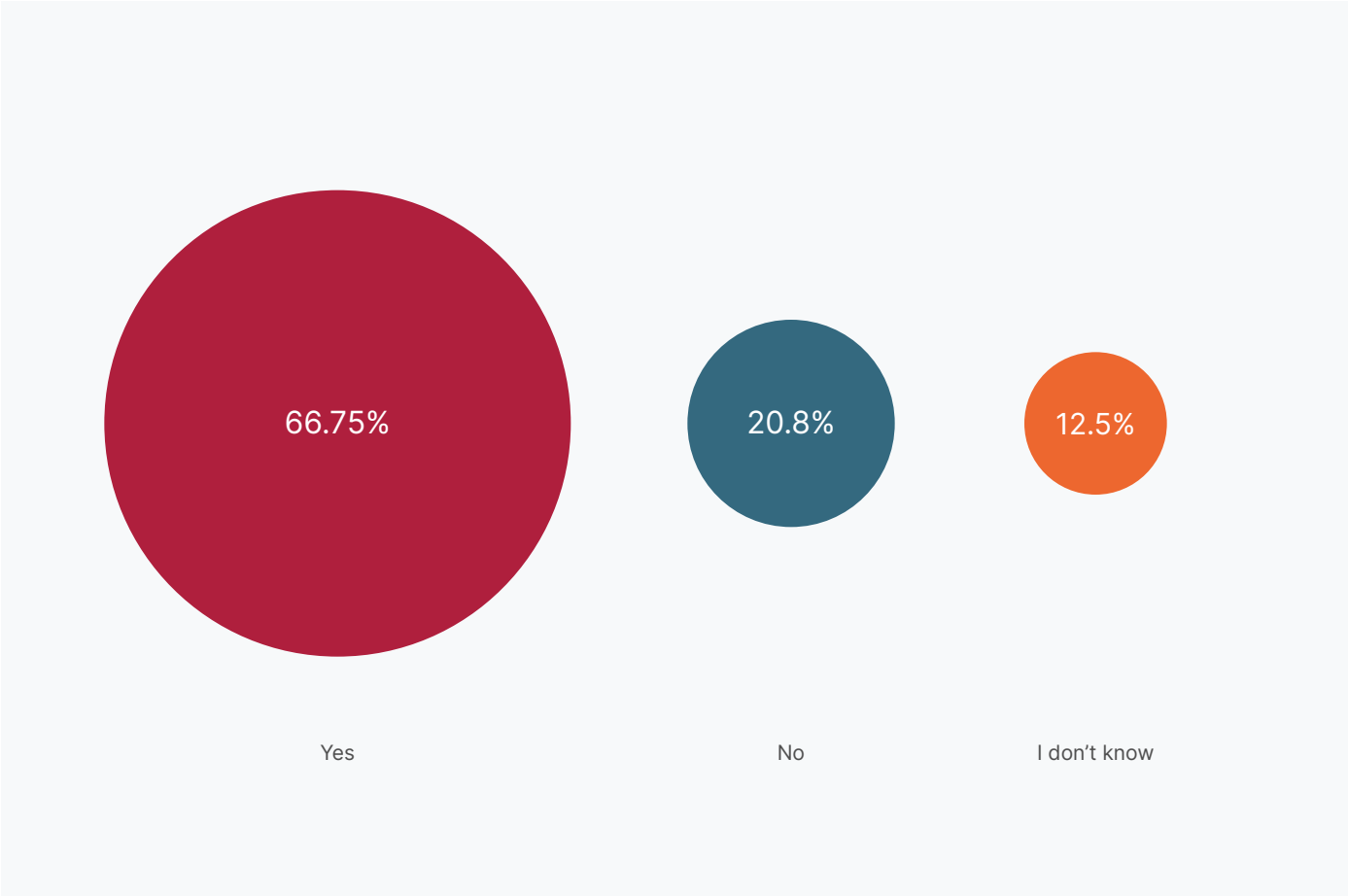
- Existing corruption
- Inability to make decisions on their own
- Partisan squabbles, contestation by colleagues because of gender and young age
- Aggression from certain colleagues
- Chauvinism and threats
- Prove that I can make difficult and sensitive decisions

The overview of the initial challenges is straightforward in itself and only illustrates the weight of the position and the burden it carries. The most complex in scope and severity is the latter, which involves different types of discrimination on a variety of grounds.

The next question concerned **personal perceptions and attitudes as to whether women in executive and senior management positions face more challenges than men in the same positions**. Respondents' responses were positive, with a high 66.7% of cases. Only 20.8% felt that their challenges did not differ significantly from those of men in the same positions. An additional 12.5% indicated uncertainty by stating that they did not possess enough information to take a definitive stance on the issue.



Figure 4: Personal Perception and Attitude of whether Women Face More Challenges than Men in the Same Positions



The next question naturally follows on from the previous one – If you think there are differences in the performance of senior management roles as a woman or a man, what is the nature of these differences? Women respondents gave relatively similar answers, such as that they are innately more responsible, they check more thoroughly what they are signing, and demand quality in their work, as opposed to men, who simply go for the quantity of completion, while for women, quality comes first.

Further, some of the answers included:

- The difference is in the prejudices and stereotypes associated with the role of women in society, and it is crucial to overcome them.
- Women have been shown in the past to be more resistant to corrupt activities than men, although this view should not be generalised.
- Certain differences are compared to the sexualisation of positions, underestimating the capacities of women in executive positions.
- Women have to put in a lot more to prove that they are worthy and fit for office, and they are always under the watchful eye of the public.
- Unlike women, men were almost never criticised for their appearance and style of dress.



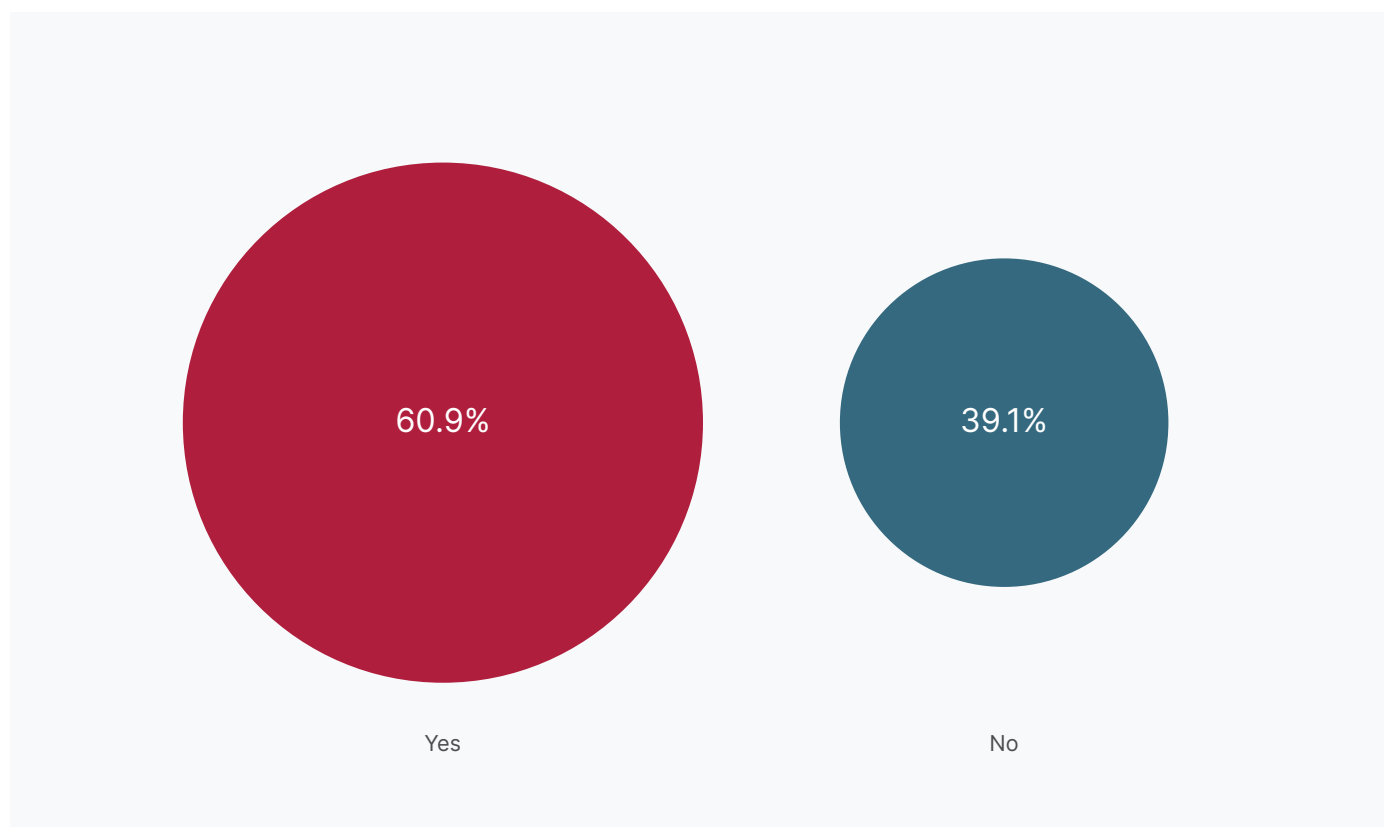
One of the statements emphasised that



The difference for women is that they first have to fight for respect among men, then for respect among women, and finally, the challenges of the new position come”.

Furthermore, when asked whether they had greater challenges in having their proposals accepted by other male colleagues at the level of Government / Governing Boards or Municipal Council, more than half of them, or 60.9% of women, answered that they did not face such difficulties, while the remaining 39.1% faced problems of this sort. The results are presented in the figure below.

Figure 5: Challenges in Having Their Proposals Accepted at the Level of the Hierarchy to Which They Report or Are Accountable

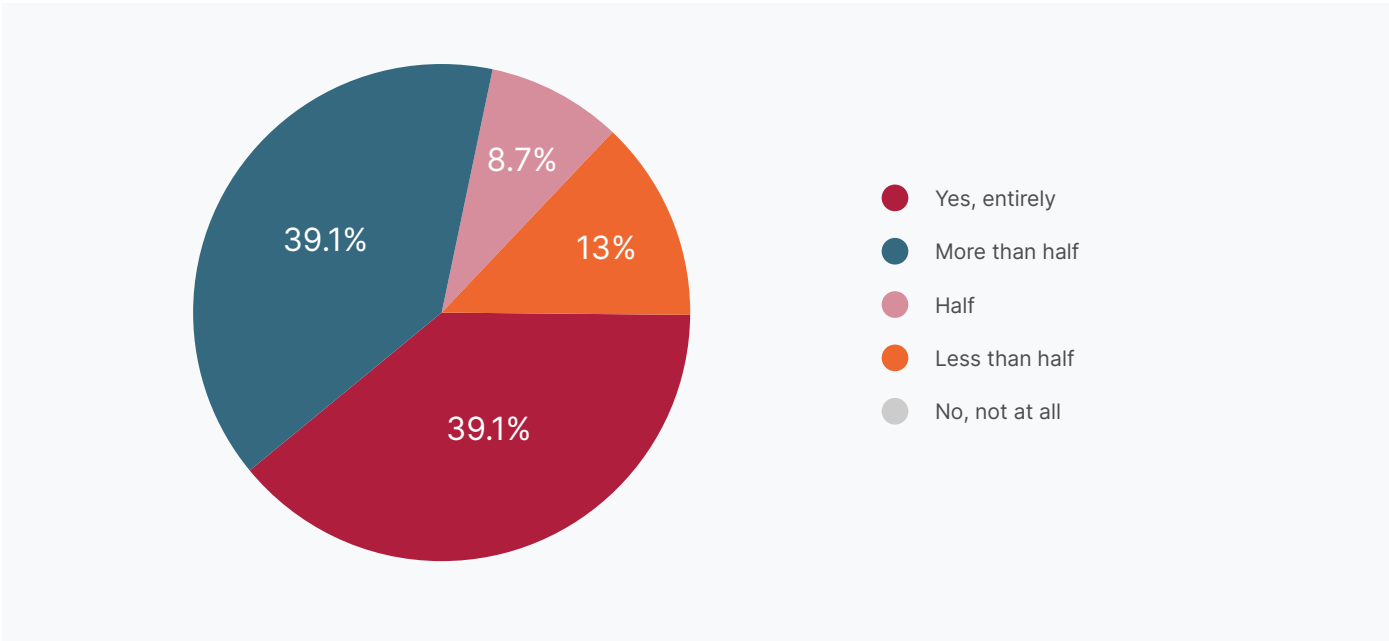


4.2.4. Implementation of the Programme and Factors that Are Decisive for Achieving the Outlined Goals

When women respondents were asked about their success in implementing the programmes they had advocated for during their term of office, a significant proportion of them indicated that they had seen through their programmes entirely (39.1%). The same share reported that they had managed to implement more than half of their programmes, while 8.7% indicated that they had managed to accomplish exactly half of the proposed programmes. Finally, 13% of participants felt that they had completed less than half of what was originally planned with their programmes. The results are shown in the following figure.



Figure 6: Level of Implementation of the Programme according to the Outlined Goals



Namely, a significant portion of this group, accounting for 78.2%, managed to accomplish all or more than half of the programme commitments for which they were responsible.

This information leads us to the conclusion that the majority of respondents

78,2 %

despite the large number of challenges, feel some level of

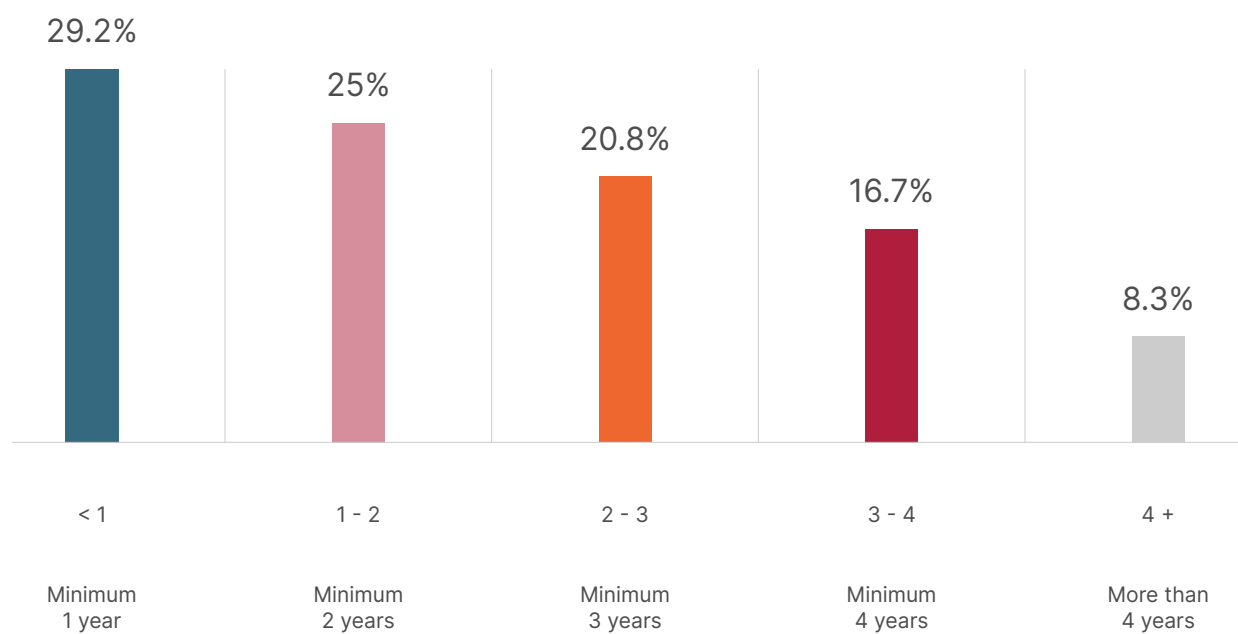
satisfaction with what they have achieved,

which underscores the importance of effective results. This can be attributed to the unwavering tenacity of these women who have taken on the responsibility of stepping into key leadership roles in institutions.

An additional success factor can be considered the element of time, which was identified in previous questions (Figure 2), that approximately 66.7% of respondents had performed their managerial function for more than 3 (4) years, or even more. Moreover, the time factor not only contributes to the overall implementation of the programme, but is also a measure of success and the changes achieved over a given period (as a result of the commitments, i.e. of the programme).

When asked how long it takes a person in an executive or senior management position to make a change in the institution in which they work, the answers are quite divided. However, by adding up responses of a minimum of 3 years or more, we get about 75% of respondents confirming that this time is enough to make a change.

Figure 7: Time Required to Make a Change in the Managed Institution



These data support the claim that, for significant changes to occur, it is imperative to allocate sufficient time and establish an appropriate cyclical implementation process over a given period.

When asked what was crucial to achieving or failing to achieve the programme and the goals as advocated, respondents emphasised their high commitment to work as being the key to achieving the set goals. Further, the answers can be broken down as follows.



Table 17: Key Factors for Achieving the Goals as Advocated

 Factors Critical to Achieving the Programme Objectives • High level of commitment • Intensive work with a focus on implementation from idea to action • Teamwork, with frameworks and phases of action and delegated responsibilities • Quality communication at every level and coordination according to a hierarchy of responsibility	 Factors Critical to Failing to Achieve the Programme Objectives • The political climate in the country and the blockade by the opposition in parliament • The economic and energy crisis as the reason for changing certain goals outlined in the programme • Lack of support from fellow party members • Insufficient support from employees
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The specified factors which are deemed decisive for successful execution of the position are indeed singled out through the experience gained in management positions. To this end, it is vital to empower the incumbents by providing targeted training programmes in each of the above domains of governance and management. At the same time, the specified factors deemed crucial for preventing the success should become part of experiential learning, the acquisition of adaptive management competencies, and practice.



4.2.5. Barriers to Overcome and Required Support

When asked about the key barriers and negative experiences they may have in the performance of their executive or senior management positions, the majority of respondents pointed to:

1. **Lack of a competent and professional team**
– the workforce consisted of numerous employees who possessed minimal expertise, as opposed to a select few who demonstrated significant knowledge.
2. There has been a **tendency to avoid personal responsibility among employees**, especially those in middle management – personal responsibility of employees is something that needs to be built on multiple levels of decision-making.

3. **Insufficient support from the institutional collective**, coupled with the prevalence of hidden discrimination.

4. **Lack of rationality in the allocation of resources** in relation to consumables – noticeable neglect of common funds, leading to significant losses.

5. **Financial constraints** have also been noted as a significant barrier and obstacle.

6. **The presence of discretionary powers**, coupled with the absence of political will, further complicated matters.

7. **Engagements with social partners**, as well as dialogue and the formulation of a comprehensive collective agreement, were key.



As far as negative experiences are concerned, manifestations of public destruction,

unfounded criticism

and political victimisation stand out, along with a notable escalation of hostile rhetoric on social media platforms and a comprehensive lack of societal awareness of gender equality.



Additionally, barriers imposed by male colleagues in positions of authority, fast-track decision-making processes, and unwarranted assessments of

physical appearance,

have replaced the appraisal of professional qualities as well as constructive feedback given by women in executive roles, which were often ignored solely because of their gender.

Certain **positive management experiences** were also observed in the majority of respondents in response to the question to single out three positive aspects of working in a senior management position. In addition, respondents gave remarkably consistent answers, with several of them highlighting:

1. **the satisfaction of fostering teamwork and leading a contented and successful collaborative team** and the formulation of communication models tailored to the institution;
2. **achieving measurable results** and visible progress for the population and citizens;
3. **personal efforts in advocacy for the women's lobby** aimed at improving the status of women in leadership positions, along with the importance of networking with colleagues of

different affiliations, thereby making meaningful acquaintances and friendships;

4. **establishing optimal working conditions in institutions;**
5. **testing the ability to make quick decisions and build the capacities to work effectively under pressure;**
6. **acquiring managerial competencies in times of crisis** and strengthening the skills needed to formulate critical decisions that contribute to the overall prosperity of all employees of the institution.

In terms of the specific skilled or professional support that respondents required to perform their functions better and more efficiently, the majority of women respondents replied that they needed the support before and during the term of office, namely through governance and management trainings for continuous professional development, networking trainings and workshops, mentoring programmes, etc.

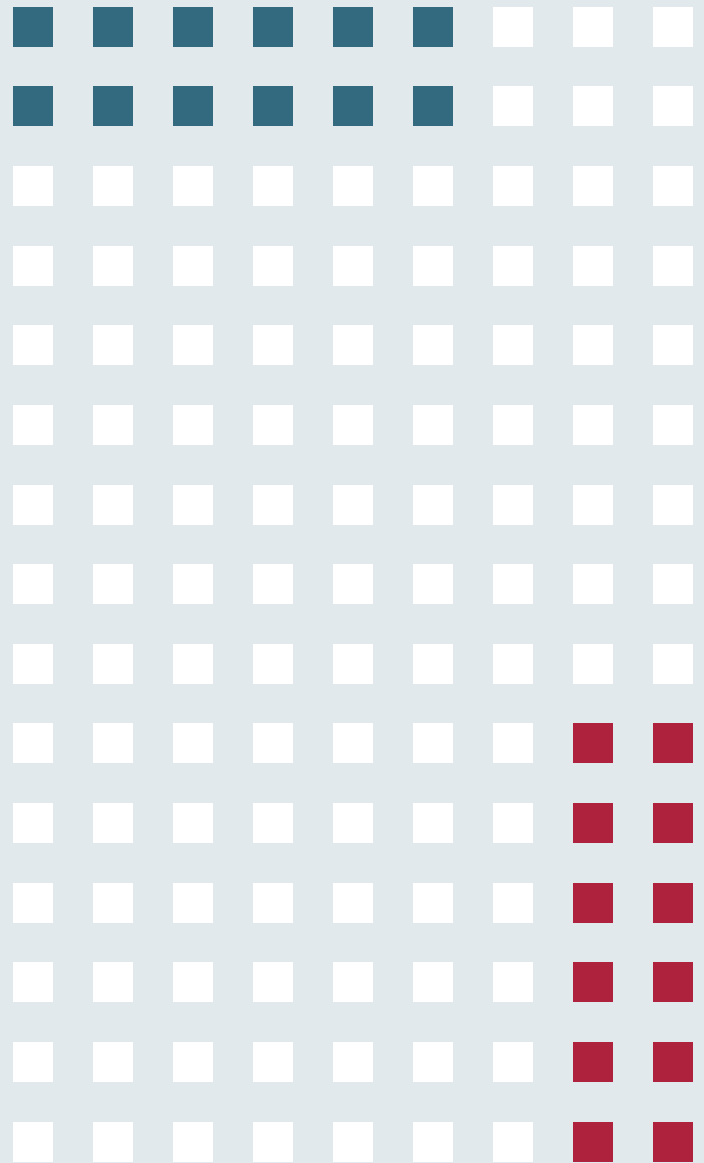
Some of the respondents also needed advice from an experienced and pragmatic lawyer to support them in their work, as well as from an economist for issues pertaining to financial management. Also mentioned is a detailed management rulebook with administrative pointers and a training in public procurement.

Regarding the specific forms of family support that would prove useful in improving the overall

performance of one such multi-layered function, participants in the analysis reported counting on encouragement and psychological support aimed at maintaining their self-esteem and determination.

Furthermore, having an understanding for their absence from home during the term of office and being supported in doing the housework and taking care of children are of paramount importance in this context. Namely, if they did not have this support from home, the performance of their management roles would not have been possible.

5



Conclusions and Recommendations for Bridging the Current Gap between Women and Men in Management Positions

5.1.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Historical Context and Current Trends:

The underrepresentation of women in leadership roles has historical roots in gender stereotypes.

Addressing Sexism and Gender Bias:

Negative perceptions and prejudices about women in leadership positions are pervasive and often undermine their authority.

Educational Reforms:

The education sector plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of leadership and overcoming gender stereotypes regarding male-female occupations.

Recommendations

- However, recent trends point to positive changes towards greater representation of women in leadership positions, suggesting that change is possible and ongoing.
- In this context, it is necessary to develop programmes and campaigns to suppress gender stereotypes and launch public awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes.
- Promoting successful role models of women in leadership positions and their competence/leadership styles (through positive examples). Highlighting successful women leaders can serve as an example and inspire others to follow similar paths.
- It is crucial to implement training programmes aimed at reducing gender bias and promoting a culture of respect and equality in government institutions.
- This includes prosecuting and punishing all instances of sexism, gender bias and gender discrimination in institutions. Addressing negative perceptions and prejudices is key to creating a supportive environment for women.
- Continuous education reform and programmes that challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes and which can create a more inclusive environment for women aspiring to leadership positions.
- Moreover, there is a need to encourage girls and women to go to school in sectors where they are underrepresented (engineering, industry, mathematics and computer science), as well as to take positive action measures for girls' access to so-called "typically male" occupations.

Data Collection and Analysis:

Updating the current methodology for collecting gender-disaggregated data, which are not yet collected in an organised manner, is essential.

- This should include collecting organised data from government reports, corporate records, and interviews with stakeholders to better understand and monitor the representation of women in leadership positions at all levels of social and political action (central and local government, public administration institutions, and the public sector in all sectors/activities).
- Continuously updating the data every 2-3 years; the data should include barriers faced by women in leadership positions.

Legal Framework and Policy Enforcement:

Our country has established a basic legal framework to promote gender equality in relevant areas (protection from discrimination, gender-based violence, etc.).

However, the area of gender equality in politics and government is not fully and comprehensively regulated.

- It is vital to ensure effective implementation and oversight of these laws to create an environment to support women in leadership.
- Introducing quotas and/or other positive action measures and solutions in the Law on the Government, the Law on the Local Self-Government, as well as in other laws regulating the appointment and election/selection of managers and directors.
- Alternatively – launching a new initiative to amend the Law on the Senior Management in Civil Service.
- Alternatively – developing positive regulations for the application of good practices in the field, regardless of them not being legally regulated (as part of operational procedures, regulations, codes of ethics, etc.).

Stakeholder Engagement:

New policies need to have broader community support in order to be implemented successfully.

- Involving various stakeholders, including government institutions, civil society organisations, and the private sector, in the development and implementation of these policies.
- Joint efforts can lead to more efficient strategies and broader support for women's participation in leadership.

Women's Support Systems:

Support systems are necessary for better management and experiential learning (available by choice also for men in leadership positions).

Support in the Work Setting:

- Women in management positions expressed the need for various forms of support, including a variety of trainings in the field of governance and management (resource and personnel management, financial management, crisis management, adaptive management, etc.).
- Some of them require trainings in the administrative management of institutions, as well as trainings in the implementation of public procurement.
- Additional legal and psychological support, as well as encouragement to maintain their confidence and determination.
- Establishing mentoring programmes and support networks can significantly improve women's ability to cope with leadership challenges.
- Promoting policies that create a supportive work environment for women, including flexible work arrangements, parental leave, and anti-discrimination measures. These policies can help keep women in leadership roles and encourage greater participation in leadership (i.e., "get in and run the field", as one participant put it).

Focus on Intersectionality:

Acknowledging and addressing intersectional issues is crucial to fostering a more equitable leadership context for women from vulnerable groups.

- Providing support for women from vulnerable communities, such as women from certain ethnic groups (Albanians, Roma), women with disabilities, women from rural areas, to access leadership positions that match their qualifications and competencies.
- This support should include access to education for vulnerable groups to acquire the appropriate qualifications needed for leadership positions.

From all of the above, we can conclude that overcoming gender inequalities in executive positions requires a multi-layered approach that includes cultural change, policy implementation, and support systems tailored to the unique challenges faced by women in leadership. By implementing these recommendations, the Government can work towards more equitable representation of women in executive roles.

5.2.

Additional Training Programmes to Overcome Gender Inequalities

To effectively address gender inequalities in leadership positions, specific training programmes are crucial. These programmes should focus on various aspects that strengthen women and promote equality in leadership roles. Here are a few recommended training programmes:

- **Leadership Development and Strategic Approaches Programmes.** These programmes should be designed to enhance women's leadership skills, focusing on strategic decision-making, negotiation, and conflict resolution. Such trainings can help women build confidence and self-esteem in their roles as leaders.
- **Gender Bias and Gender Sensitivity Sessions and Workshops.** Conducting sessions and workshops for other groups that address unconscious bias and sexism in the workplace is of key importance. These programmes can educate all employees about the impact of gender bias and promote a culture of respect and inclusion in government institutions.
- **Mentorship and Sponsorship Initiatives.** It can be helpful to establish mentoring programmes in which experienced women leaders lead and support younger women. These initiatives can provide networking opportunities and practical advice on how to navigate the challenges of leadership positions.
- **Work-Life Balance Workshops.** Training dedicated to managing work-life balance can help women in management positions cope with the twin demands of professional and personal responsibilities. This may include time

management strategies and stress reduction techniques, but may also include childcare services in the workplace, home care services, etc.

- **Public Speaking and Communication Skills.** Programmes aimed at improving public speaking and communication skills can encourage women to express their ideas confidently and effectively in meetings and public forums. This is essential for gaining visibility and influence in executive roles.
- **Policy Making and Development Training.** Training that will strengthen women's skills to create and develop policies that promote gender equality and support women's participation in leadership can have an impact. It may involve understanding legislative processes and developing effective measures and policies, and may include certain advocacy and lobbying techniques (in front of superiors in the system and hierarchy, in front of potential donors, etc.).
- **Networking and Collaboration Skills.** Workshops that focus on building networking skills can help women connect with peers and mentors, fostering collaboration and support among women in leadership positions.

By implementing these targeted training programmes, the government can create a supportive environment for women in executive positions, which will ultimately lead to greater gender equality in leadership roles. These initiatives should be part of a broader strategy to promote women's participation and address the systemic barriers they face in the workplace.

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