



Where Are Women

in Leadership Roles in
the Executive Branch and
Administration?



British Embassy
Skopje



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Analysis of the Representation of Women in Senior Management Positions

– Information Brief

Over the past decade, numerous initiatives and activities aimed at improving the status of women in every aspect of public life have been implemented in the Republic of North Macedonia. However, gender inequality is still widespread in our society. The current distribution of powers and governance is still far from achieving full gender parity – i.e. equal distribution of leadership roles between women and men. This indicator is key to ensuring women's equal participation in government, equal access to decision-making processes, and equitable distribution of power in society. Addressing these issues is not only a matter of social justice, but also a strategic necessity for sustainable and equitable development.

This analysis looks at the representation and participation of women in leadership positions at several levels of social governance over 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, in the Government, and in line ministries, as well as in the institutions that are part of the administration at the central and local levels and in the public sector. The purpose of this analysis is to give an overview of the current state of affairs and monitor the trends in the (lack of) improvement made over the past ten years.

The analysis was conducted between mid-August and late December 2024 and included desk research and quantitative data collection 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 provided data on the problems and challenges faced by women in leadership positions, as well as their recommendations for improving the situation in this area.

What Do Data Show?

Women are still politically underrepresented at all levels of government. We can say that the greatest progress has been made in the Assembly and in the municipal councils, because the Electoral Code provides for at least 40 percent of candidates to be of the underrepresented sex. As a result of these amendments, the representation of women in the Assembly and in municipal councils has been significantly increased.

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.¹

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

Where no quotas are in force, the number of women has continuously been small. If we look at the composition of all the Governments in the period 2014–2024, we can see that the total number of women ministers ranged from 2 to a maximum of 5, which in turn shows that this trend of low involvement of women in high politics is a negative trend that goes back for years – from independence to the present day.

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.

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.

¹ <https://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/2022/MK_WandM-NMK-Report_WEB_0.pdf> (p. 13–14).

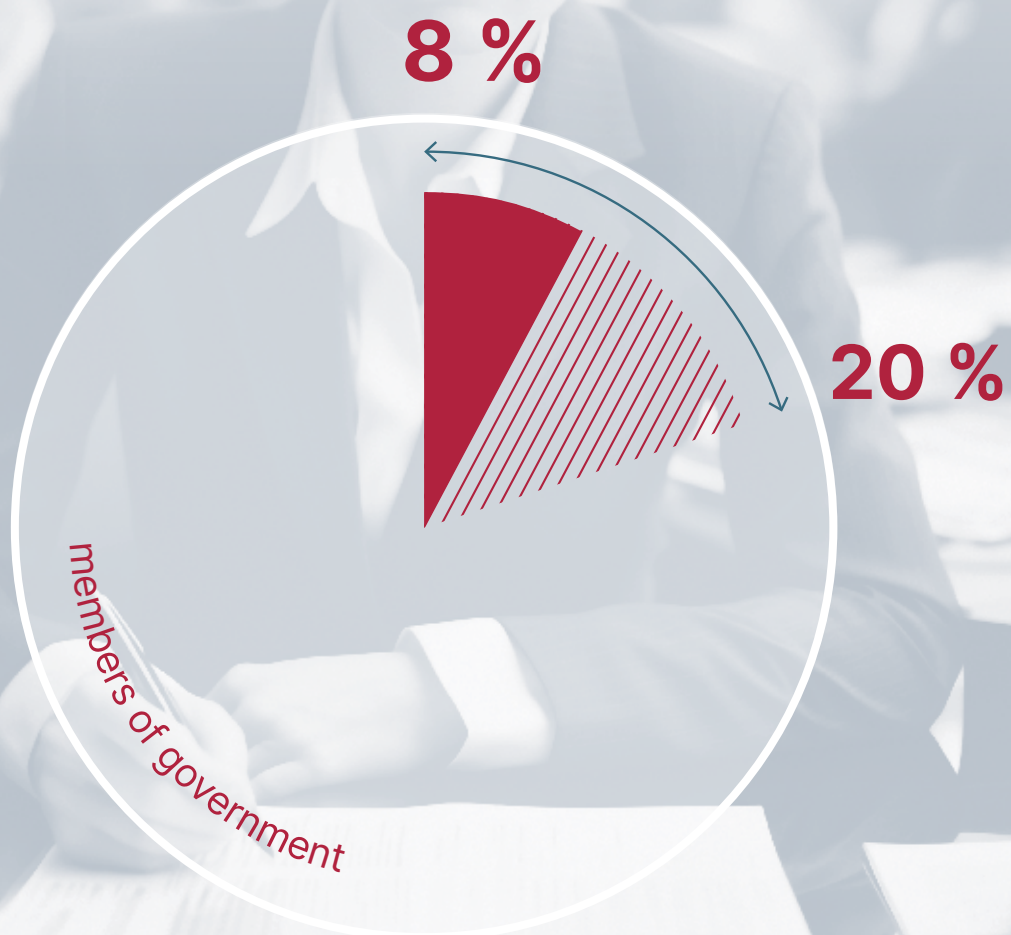
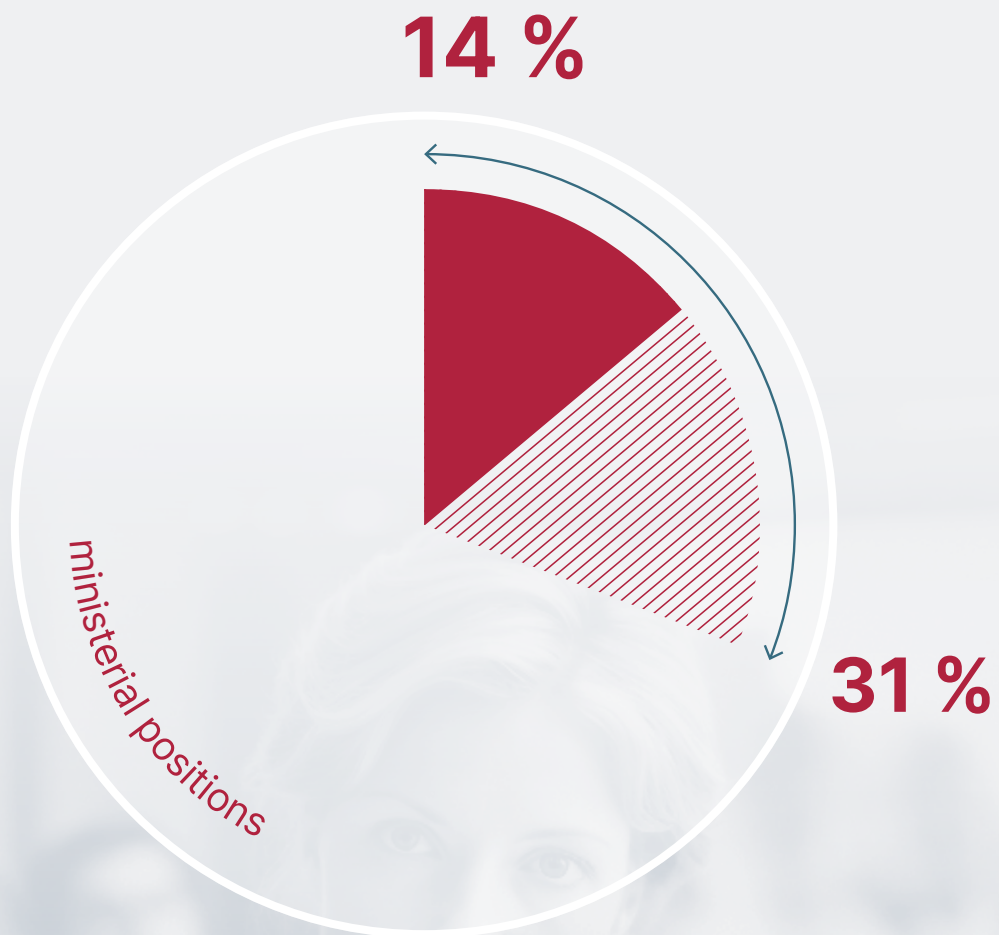
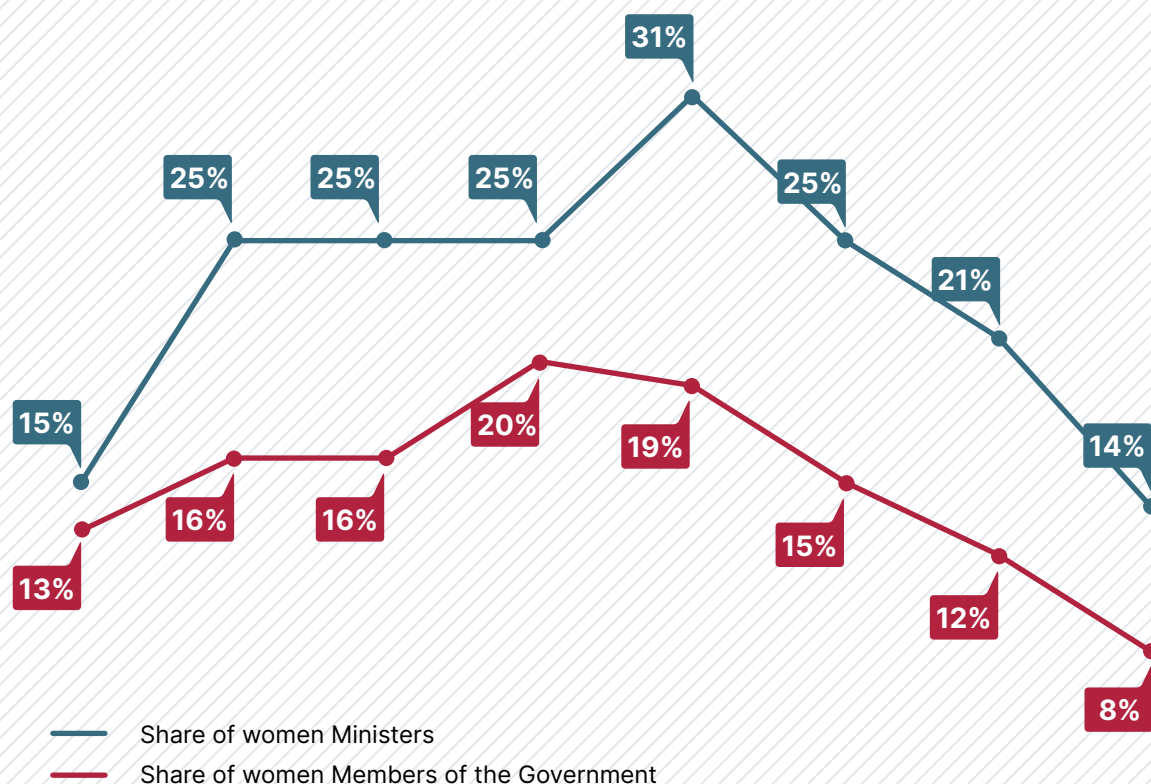


Chart 1:

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

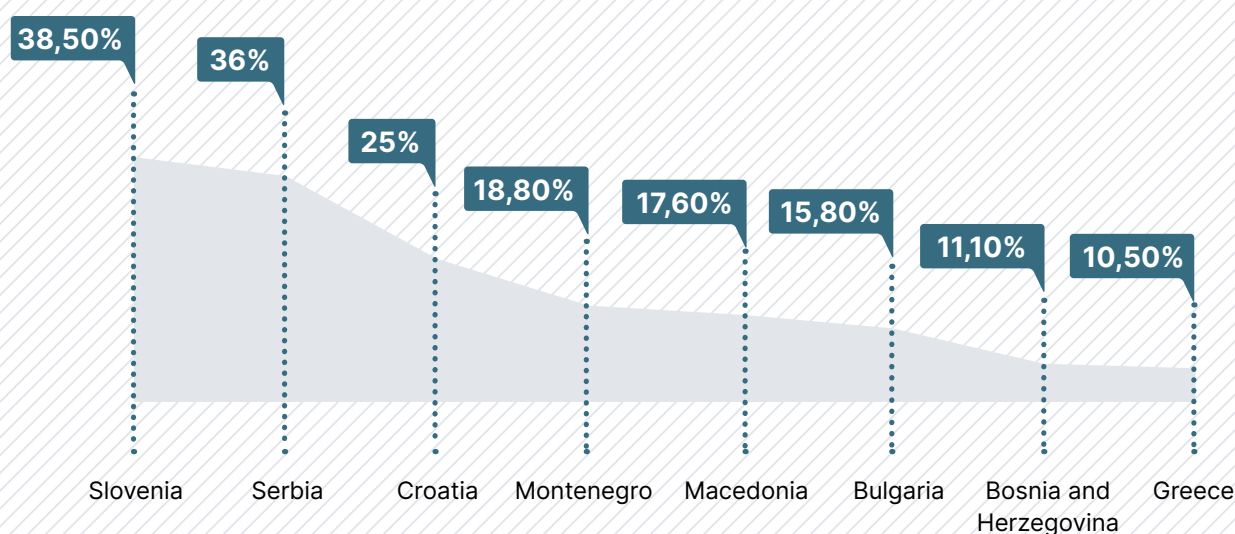


Experiences from the Region

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. The rest of the countries in the region are presented in the following chart.

Chart 2.

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



In terms of the **portfolios** held by women within all governments over the past decade, these have usually been in the areas of education, labour and social policy, culture and justice. Very seldom, women have been the Minister of the Interior (2014), the Minister of Defence (2020 and 2022) and, currently, the 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 branch 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.



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.

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.

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.

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 parity² on this issue.

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

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.

2014 › **28,6%** 2022 › **31,3%** 2024 › **10%**

² <https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/thesaurus/terms/1258?language_content_entity=en>.



What Do These Data Tell Us?

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.

How Do We Reduce the Gender Gap in Political Participation in Power Structures?

50%

representation
of women on
parliamentary and
councillor lists

Despite the progress made, the country still lacks comprehensive legal regulation that will allow equal access and equal participation of women in decision-making positions. Therefore, **legislative improvements are key to promoting gender equality and greater representation of women in management positions.** It is important to work towards the adoption of comprehensive gender equality laws and electoral reforms that will ensure equal representation of women and men. In this regard, we recommend that amendments be made to the Electoral Code that would allow for a final **50%** representation of women on parliamentary and councillor lists. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe recommends that member states consider introducing “zipper systems”, i.e. alternating seats for both sexes, which would place women in more favourable positions



on candidate lists and thus increase their chances of being elected. Consideration could also be given to introducing gender-sensitive public funding into electoral legislation to promote women's participation, i.e. revising campaign funding rules to provide financial incentives for political parties to nominate more female candidates. This could allow women, especially from underrepresented groups, such as women from rural areas, from smaller ethnic communities, women with disabilities, to have access to spots on candidate lists so as to be elected.

The low number of women in the executive branch, i.e. at ministerial positions in the Government, is also due to the absence of positive action measures, i.e. quotas, and therefore it is necessary to make **amendments to the Law on the Government so as to introduce gender quotas in this piece of legislation, too.**

Political parties are the key actors that can influence the removal of barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against women's participation and adopt appropriate policies to promote women's ability to participate fully at all levels of decision-making within political parties. Concrete steps to improve gender equality within their internal structures by institutionalising the principle of gender equality in parties may include introducing and/or observing gender quotas in party leaderships and decision-making bodies, as well as developing formal and informal support systems for women politicians.

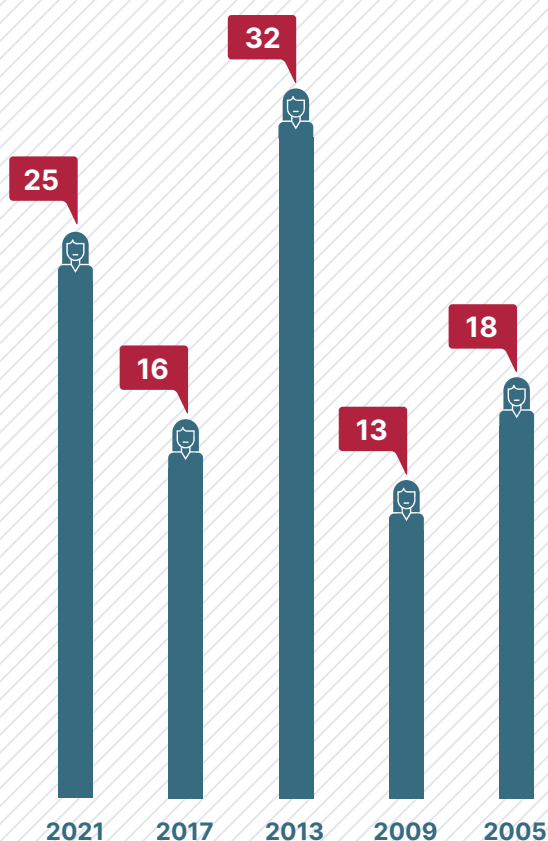
Representation of Women in Local Government

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. Unfortunately, in our country, the picture at the local level is even worse: out of 80 municipalities and the City of Skopje, there are only 2 Women Mayors. 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.

The chart below can serve as an illustration reflecting the share of women and men running for mayoral office. The data are presented in the following chart.

Chart 3:
Number of Women
Candidates in Local
Elections ³

We can conclude that women run in much smaller numbers compared to men, but even this small number does not translate into elected mayoral offices.



³ Source: Жените и мажите во Република Северна Македонија, 2023. <https://www.stat.gov.mk/publikacii/2023/ZeniteMazite_2023.pdf>.

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.⁴ 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 context⁵. 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.



It is important to work towards the adoption of comprehensive gender equality laws and electoral reforms that will ensure equal representation of women and men. To this end, we recommend introducing quotas for women mayoral candidates.

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

5 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>> .

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

Culture

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 national theatres, cultural homes, libraries, etc.). From the data 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%**.

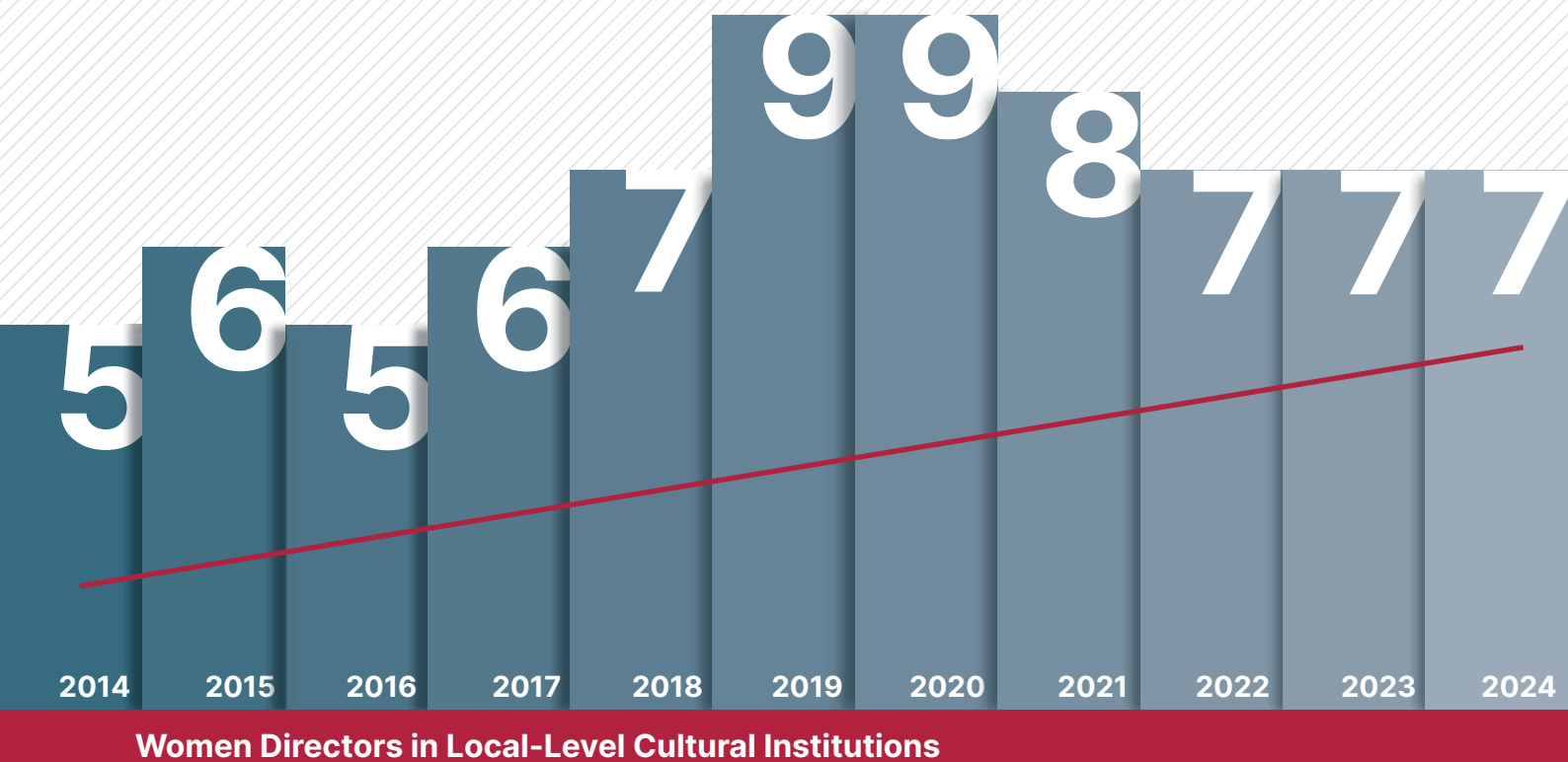
If we analyse the trend over the years, we can note a certain increase in the representation of women occupying managerial roles in public institutions in the cultural sector, especially evident in the period 2019–2020. The increase, albeit minimal, marks a recurring slight decline after 2020, which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

5 TO 9 WOMEN DIRECTORS IN 128 CULTURAL PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS



Chart 4:

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



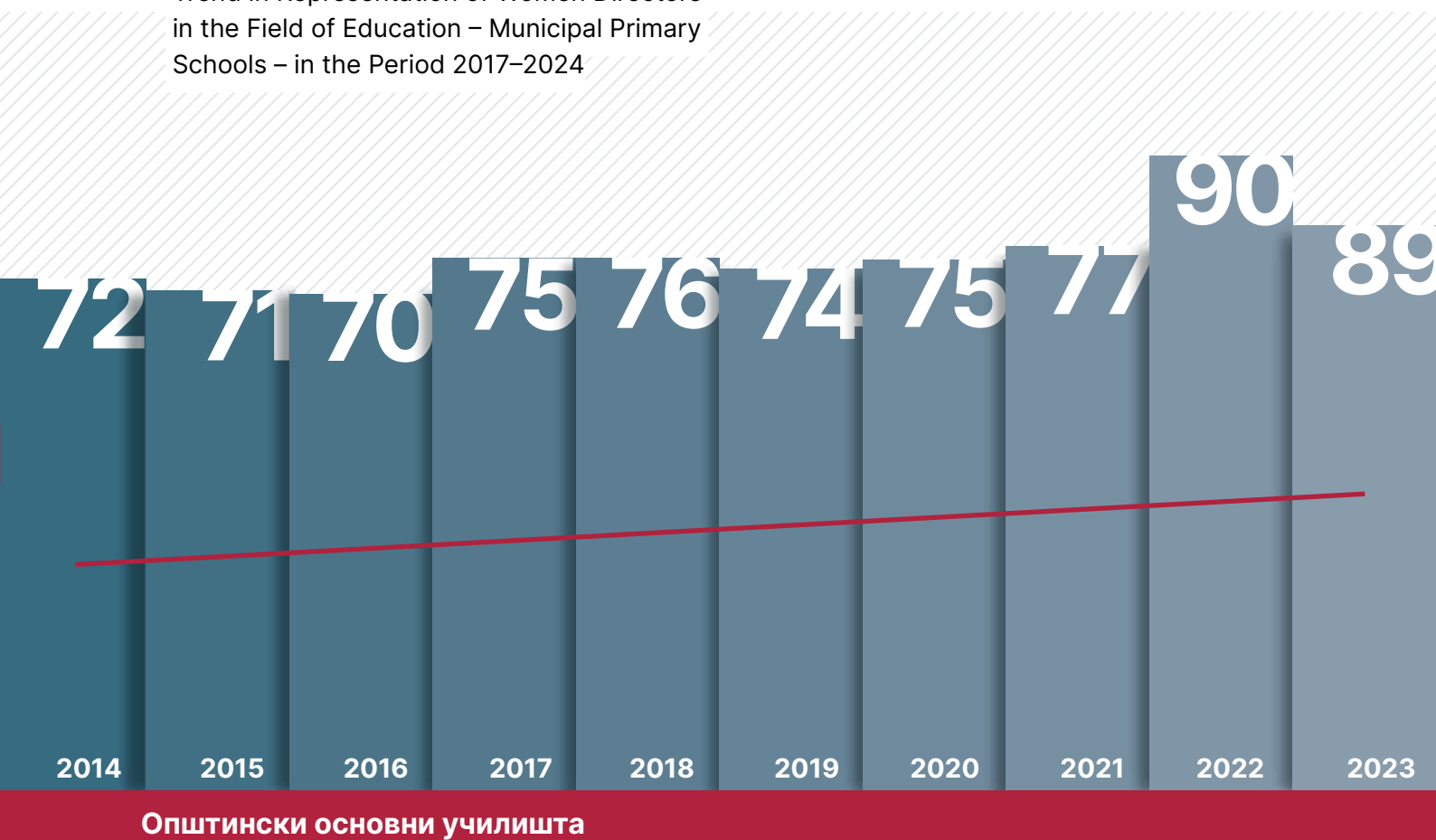
However, we can conclude that the participation of women in leadership positions in the field of culture at the local level is expressed in single digits with a share of 7% or less, which does not reflect gender equality at all. Especially since the number of employed women in the field of culture is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

Education

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).

Chart 5:

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



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.

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.

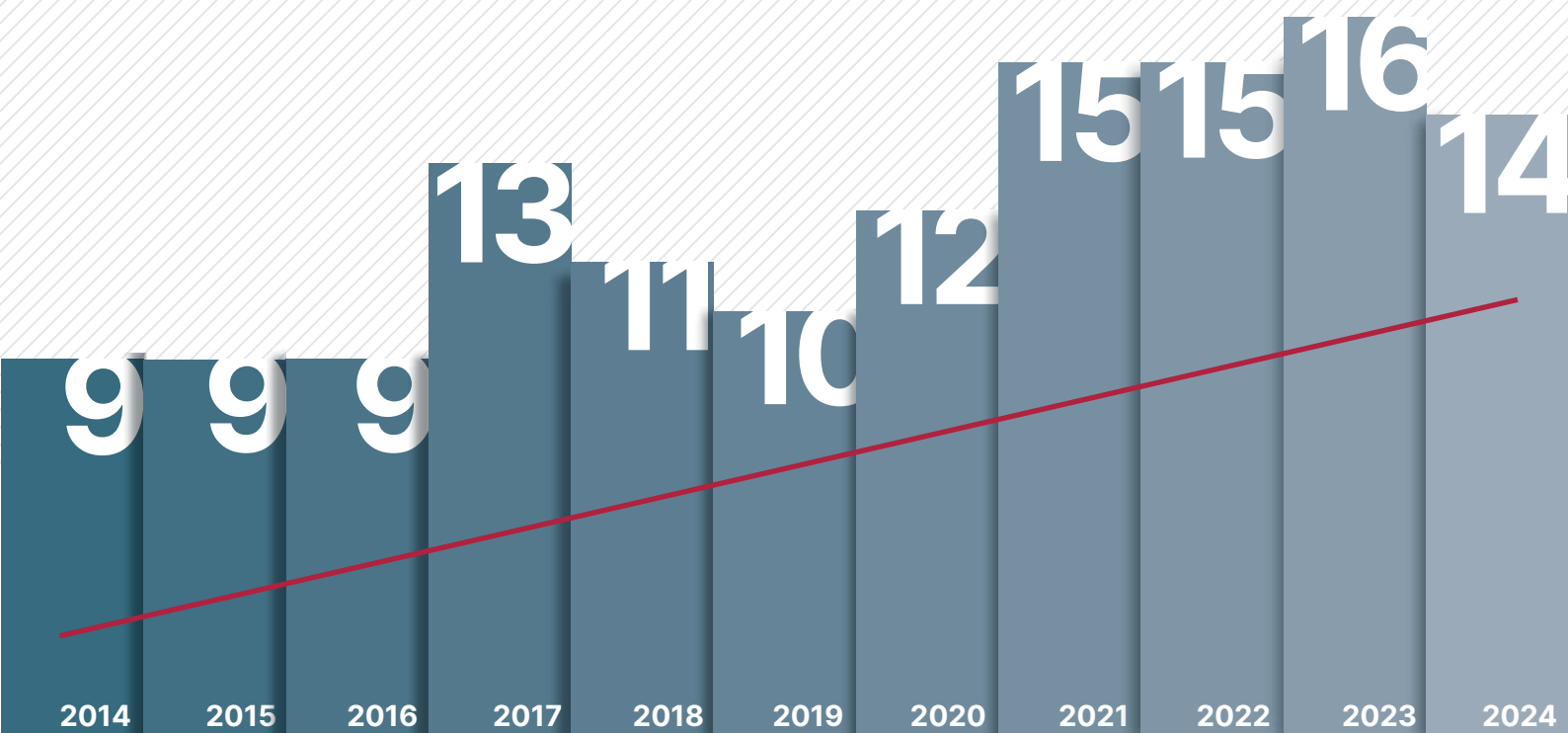


In terms of women in leadership positions in municipal secondary schools, the lowest share was recorded between 2014 and 2016 – **6.9%**; and the highest at **12.4%** in 2023. However, these figures do not meet the gender representation of women in municipal secondary schools, especially considering 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 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.

Chart 6:

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



Women Directors in Municipal Secondary Schools

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.

Childcare

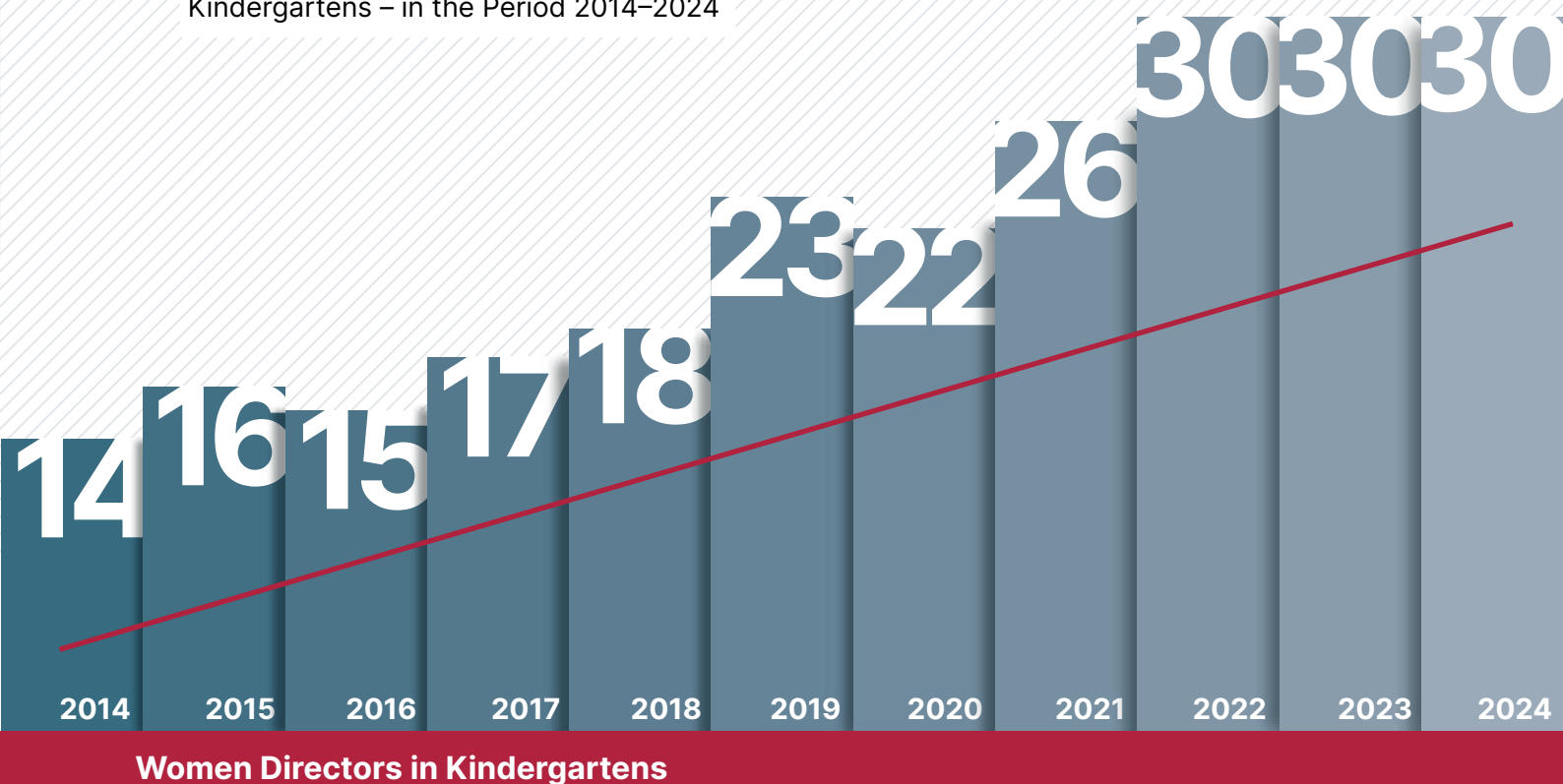
Since 2014, we have seen a mild but steady growing trend of women directors in public childcare facilities – kindergartens. The share is on the rise, with the exception of the years 2017 and 2020. According to the State Statistical Office, there are a total of 77 state-run public institutions for children 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.

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.



Chart 7:

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



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. 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.

As the country'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.⁷

6 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>.

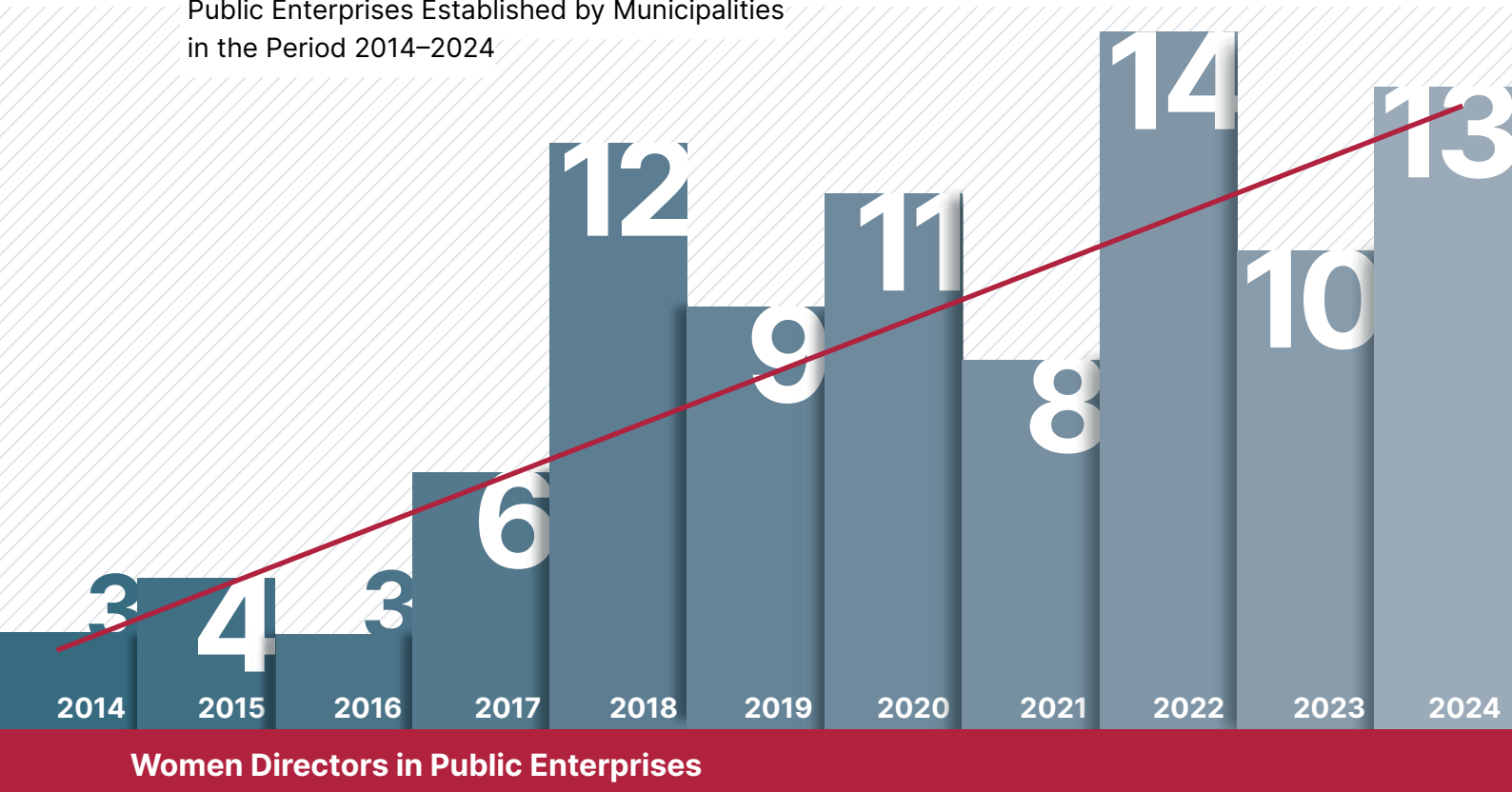
7 Hindy Lauer Schachter, Women in Public Administration: Giving Gender a Place in Education for Leadership, 2015. <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0095399715611173?journalCode=aasb>>.

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

From the comprehensive records of the MoISA register, it can be 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.

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. 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.

Chart 8:
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.



Recommendations for Bridging the Gender Gap in Leadership Positions in Administration

With regard to leadership positions in public administration, in 2019, a Law on the Senior Management in Civil Service, based on the merit system and professional advancement, was proposed, but it was soon withdrawn for revision and harmonisation. This law may also provide for positive action measures to give preference to the underrepresented sex under conditions of equal fulfilment of the requirements. This could address sectoral inequality, which shows that women dominate sectors such as culture, health and education, but are almost absent in energy, economy and transport.

Strengthening the Support Systems for Women

Cultural norms and traditional attitudes dictate that women continue to be perceived as primarily responsible for domestic duties and childcare, and less capable of being in leadership and management positions. Due to their responsibilities to do the housework or care for the children or the elderly, women are limited in participating in events, networking, or frequenting out-of-hours travels that can help them progress professionally. Promoting policies that create a supportive work environment for women may also include flexible work arrangements, parental leave, and anti-discrimination measures. These policies can help keep women in leadership roles and encourage more women to enter the field. Therefore, it is extremely important to work on systemic solutions that will also provide an opportunity for a balance in women's professional and personal development. Passing a new Law on Labour Relations that would provide parental and paternity leave should be a priority.

Additional Training Programmes to Overcome Gender Inequalities

To effectively address gender inequalities in leadership positions, specific training programmes should also be envisaged that will focus on various aspects that empower women and promote equality in leadership roles. Recommended training programmes include leadership development and strategic approach programmes; mentoring programmes, where experienced women leaders guide and support younger women; networking and collaboration skills. It is also recommended to develop various forms of support in the field of governance and management (resource and personnel management, financial management, crisis management, adaptive management, etc.), trainings in administrative management of institutions, etc. In addition, attention should be paid to equal inclusion in providing support to women from vulnerable communities, such as women from non-majority ethnic groups, women with disabilities, women from rural areas, to access leadership positions that are consistent with their qualifications and competencies.

**Strengthening
Cooperation with
Civil Society
Organisations and
Relevant Bodies**

Cooperation with the civil society, the parliamentary Commission on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, the Club of Women MPs, and the Equal Opportunities Department in the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth, should be used as key mechanisms for gender equality promotion, and for jointly developing programmes, long-term strategies and legislation that will aim to counter gender stereotypes and prejudices against women and men in decision-making power. Support for women's civil society organisations is particularly important in order to increase their visibility and legitimacy and sensitise the community to the need for more substantive inclusion of women in public life.

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