

WOMEN IN POLITICS 2:
PATH TO PUBLIC
OFFICE AND IMPACT
AT THE LOCAL LEVEL
IN NORTH MACEDONIA
(A FOLLOW-UP STUDY)

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ACRONYMS

NDI	National Democratic Institute
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
CAWI	Computer Assisted Web Interviews
CATI	Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews
IDI	In-Depth Interviews
EU	European Union
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
UN	United Nations
MPs	Members of Parliament
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization

INTRODUCTION

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is conducting an empowerment program in North Macedonia, known as #WoMenLead, to lower the individual, socio-cultural and institutional barriers to women's political participation in the country. The program is funded by Sweden through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and its aims are to improve gender equality in political parties, provide women candidates with both the skills and supportive environment to campaign successfully for local level representation, and to reduce violence against women in politics.

Within NDI's three-pronged approach and envisaged collaboration with civil society organizations, a comprehensive research and analysis study on women's participation in politics at local level in North Macedonia (further referred to as Analysis) was conducted by Reactor. The Analysis built upon and followed an earlier successful study on the same topic, conducted by Reactor in 2014.

The objective of this follow-up Analysis was providing fresh evidence to support advocacy activities and public debate in North Macedonia to increase public awareness of women's political status at the local level. Moreover, the current social and economic conditions of women in the country and gender gaps in local level political participation were analyzed and assessed. In this regard, the Baseline Study has revealed that even though the introduction of the quota has secured a substantial increase in the participation of women in politics, their overall impact was still limited. On the other hand, where there are no quotas, significant gender gaps remain.¹ In light of this, the Analysis aims to identify shifts and changes in factors that contribute to persistent gender inequalities at different levels of government and the levels in which they occur: personal, institutional, economic, and political.

The Analysis took into consideration the socio-economic aspects within the context of the general gender gap, gender equality in the country and gender equality in public life, while putting a particular focus on women's participation in politics and decision making at local level.

¹ Reactor - Research into Action. (2015). Women in Politics: Paths to Public Office and Impact at the Local Level in Macedonia. Retrieved from <https://reactor.org.mk/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2020/05/Women-in-politics.pdf> Last Accessed: May 8, 2023.

The Analysis was structured into four different stages:

1. Desk research - including a review of secondary sources and relevant documentation, as well as review of research methodology and revision of research instruments from the Baseline Study (briefly described above);
2. Primary data collection - quantitative data collection through computer assisted web interviews (CAWI) and qualitative data collection through semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDI);
3. Data analysis and compilation of findings from the different data collection processes, including primary and secondary data, as well as quantitative and qualitative findings;
4. Verification and validation of the preliminary findings in six municipalities and final reporting.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Aleksandra Cvetkovska and Filip Kondovski from the NDI office in Skopje for their advice, understanding, and expert comments that they provided in all stages of the project. We would also like to extend our gratitude to both NDI and the Swedish Embassy in Skopje for recognizing the pressing need for a study of this kind and actively supporting gender equality in Macedonian politics through their work in the country. Finally, we are incredibly grateful to the local municipalities for their unwavering support and dedication to providing essential logistical support and for their indispensable aid in bringing our study to a close.

We would also like to thank all the women and men who are active in political life in the country and who took the time to participate in this study. Without their participation, we would not have been able to gather the data that is contained in this report that is crucial to future efforts for achieving gender parity in politics.

CONTEXT

Gender Equality in the Country

In North Macedonia, gender equality remains one of the largest barriers to effective governance, despite efforts and various initiatives aimed at improving overall conditions and incorporating the principle of equality throughout all areas of society. The current Law of Equal Opportunities of Women and Men, adopted in 2012, serves to establish equal opportunities for women and men in all areas of life and eliminate barriers to achieving complete gender equality. The term ‘equal opportunities’ is defined as equal distribution of opportunities for education, training, employment, career development and the exercise of power amongst all citizens without being disadvantaged on the basis of gender.² The Law provides a framework for gender-based integration while aiming to overcome current unfavorable social positions of women and men. The law also provides a legal basis for the introduction of special measures for achieving de facto gender equality.

Gender-based discrimination in the workplace remains widespread. In 2022, Reactor published its second analysis of gender-based discrimination and labor in North Macedonia³, confirming findings from 2018.⁴ Gender-based violence against women is rampant in all areas of the workplace, including within the hiring and promotion process. This violence is further fueled by sexism and gender stereotypes. In fact, most women reported experiences with personal questions in job interviews that imply discrimination, often related to marital and parenting status or family planning intentions. Pregnancy is still perceived as a risky career move and women are often made to choose between having a paid job or being able to care for their children. These findings are in line with the official statistical data, which highlights an increase in the employment gap amongst women and men with preschool aged children. To a lesser extent, men also report discrimination, but while sharing specific personal experiences of being discriminated against by a female colleague, the stories in which the colleague was promoted implied sexual objectification or even harassment of the ‘privileged’ woman. Employed women are still repeatedly

2 Eurofound. (2011). Equal opportunities. Retrieved from <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/industrial-relations-dictionary/equal-opportunities>. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023.

3 Reactor - Research into Action. (2022). Gender-Based Discrimination and Labor in North Macedonia. Retrieved from https://reactor.org.mk/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2022/03/en_b5-web.pdf. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023.

4 Reactor - Research into Action. (2019). Gender-Based Discrimination and Labor in North Macedonia. Retrieved from https://reactor.org.mk/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2022/03/en_b5-web.pdf. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023.

victims of sexual harassment at work, with the perpetrators most often being men in higher positions, implying that power is inherent to workplace sexual harassment.

According to Eurostat data from 2019 used in the Men in Care⁵ Country Report, published by Reactor in 2021, when compared to the EU-member states and the neighboring Western Balkan countries, North Macedonia has one of the lowest employment rates and one of the greatest gender gaps in employment. The data presented in the report shows that the gender gap in employment is 19.7 percent, while the EU average is 12.1 percent.

The socio-economic inequalities between men and women can also be discerned from the gender-based seclusion within the labor market. Men are 100% of CEOs and 75% of executives in North Macedonia's publicly listed companies⁶. More generally, men make up 80.8% of employers and 77.4% of the self-employed while women only make up the majority amongst unpaid family workers.⁷ Occupational segregation suggests that women are overrepresented in precarious, low-paid industries such as the textile, leather, and garment industry, where 80% of the employed are women.⁸

According to the latest census data, 57% of working-age women are left out of the labor market and categorized as economically inactive.⁹ According to official statistics, 59% of the economically inactive population of women (aged 20-64) are not seeking employment because of family or caring responsibilities, while only 2% of economically inactive men are not seeking employment for the same reason.¹⁰ The striking difference is, once again, a firm confirmation of the persistent divide that casts women as exclusively responsible for family duties, performing the "invisible" unpaid care work, while men are "the providers", doing the paid work, with prospects for career and social security benefits. Citing care/family responsibilities as the reason for economic inactivity is clearly present at the EU level as well, but the divide is comparably less pronounced (though still salient with 26% of inactive women not seeking employment compared to 3.3% of men who are inactive for family/caring responsibilities).¹¹

5 Reactor - Research into Action. (2021). Men In Care (Mic): Caring Masculinities in North Macedonia - Country Report. Retrieved from https://reactor.org.mk/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/11/menincare_web_en.pdf. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023.

6 European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). (2020). Largest listed companies: CEOs, executives and non-executives, 2020-b. Retrieved from <https://urlz.com/J4PCU>. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023

7 Macedonian Statistical Office. (2021). Census Data. Retrieved from <http://makstat.stat.gov.mk>. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023

8 Macedonian Statistical Office. (2019). Labor Market Data for 2019. Retrieved from <http://makstat.stat.gov.mk>. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023

9 State Statistical Office. (2022). Total resident population, households and dwellings in the Republic of North Macedonia, Census 2021. Retrieved from https://www.stat.gov.mk/InfoGraphic/2022/POPIS_DZS_web_MK.pdf. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023.

10 Reactor - Research in Action. (2022). Gender Statistics and Gender Mainstreaming of the Statistical System of North Macedonia. Retrieved from https://reactor.org.mk/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2022/08/rodova_analiza_en-1.pdf. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023.

11 Eurostat. Persons outside the labour force due to caring responsibilities by sex [Dataset]. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/product?code=sdg_05_40. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023.

Furthermore, amongst the unemployed population of working-age women in North Macedonia, 38.6% are registered by the official state statistic as “housewives” – a category that is persistently represented by women and a category that, in the official state statistical nomenclature, exists only as a “feminative”¹². These women shoulder the burden of household work; however, their labor of care is not financially compensated, trapping them in economic dependency and facing the risk of economic violence. Since these women are not registered as actively looking for employment, they are left without unemployment benefits and without pension benefits in the long run¹³.

According to the Men in Care report findings, women in North Macedonia on average perform 72.5% of the total unpaid care work, while men’s contribution barely exceeds a quarter of the total workload. On a daily basis, compared to men, women spend 18 times more time washing dishes, 12 times more time cleaning, 9 times more time cooking, and 3 times more time on childcare¹⁴. The official statistics for North Macedonia, produced with Time-use Surveys¹⁵, which analyze how people use their time daily, confirm the stereotypical pattern of gendered division. The surveys show that, on average, men spend more time on paid work (employment), while women devote more time on unpaid care work¹⁶. In one working day, an average of 70.9% of the time spent on work for men is compensated, while only 37.6% of women’s time spent on work is paid (Charmes 2019). . When considering the time spent on both paid and unpaid work, the working day of women is on average 22.9% longer than the working day of men, but unfortunately, the domestic labor of care is left out of the nomenclature of the formal economy¹⁷.

According to the latest Census data, working women are earning less than men in all but one municipality, in which the average salary for women is only slightly larger than the average salary for men. Even though on a national level women earn 12% less than men, the differences amongst municipalities differ widely. It is interesting to note that the lowest gap is present in municipalities where the average pay is lowest, i.e., very close to minimum wage. Moreover, it seems that the pay gap increases as the average wage increases. The biggest difference can be seen not only in municipalities where industries typically require physically demanding labor that is male dominated, like mining, but

12 Census 2021 data obtained by Reactor from State Statistical Office

13 *ibid*

14 Reactor - Research into Action. (2021). Men In Care (Mic): Caring Masculinities in North Macedonia - Country Report. Retrieved from https://reactor.org.mk/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/11/menincare_web_en.pdf. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023.

15 State Statistical Office. (2014/2015). Time Use Survey [Dataset]. Retrieved from https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziPublikacija_en.aspx?id=58&rbr=599. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023.

16 *ibid*

17 *ibid*

also in areas where a higher proportion of residents have advanced education and work in professional fields, such as the Karpos and Centar municipalities located in the capital city of Skopje.

Gender Equality in Political Life

National Level

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union rankings of the percentage of women in National Parliaments, North Macedonia is ranked 22nd with 42.5% of parliamentary seats held by women.¹⁸ According to UN calculations, one-third of the countries that have reached or surpassed 40% (including North Macedonia) have applied gender quotas—either legislated candidate quotas or reserved seats—opening space for women’s political participation in national parliaments. At the current rate of progress, gender parity in national legislative bodies will not be achieved before 2063¹⁹. On the local level, women constitute 35% of elected members in local deliberative bodies, which is similar to the average of 34% of women in local government observed on a global level²⁰.

North Macedonia uses a one chamber parliament for representation, which then in turn elects the executive branch of the government and uses 9 electoral units (3 from the diaspora) to elect between 120 and 123 representatives in a closed list system. The seats in each electoral unit (20 per unit in the country and three from the diaspora lists if candidates reach the minimum needed votes) are then assigned to the political parties with the D’Hondt proportional representational mode²¹. The electoral methods have changed throughout the years, with the current one in place since 2002, which also for the first time included gender regulated quotas of at least 30% of “the lesser represented gender” being mandatory in each list.²² The quota was subsequently increased to 40% in 2015.

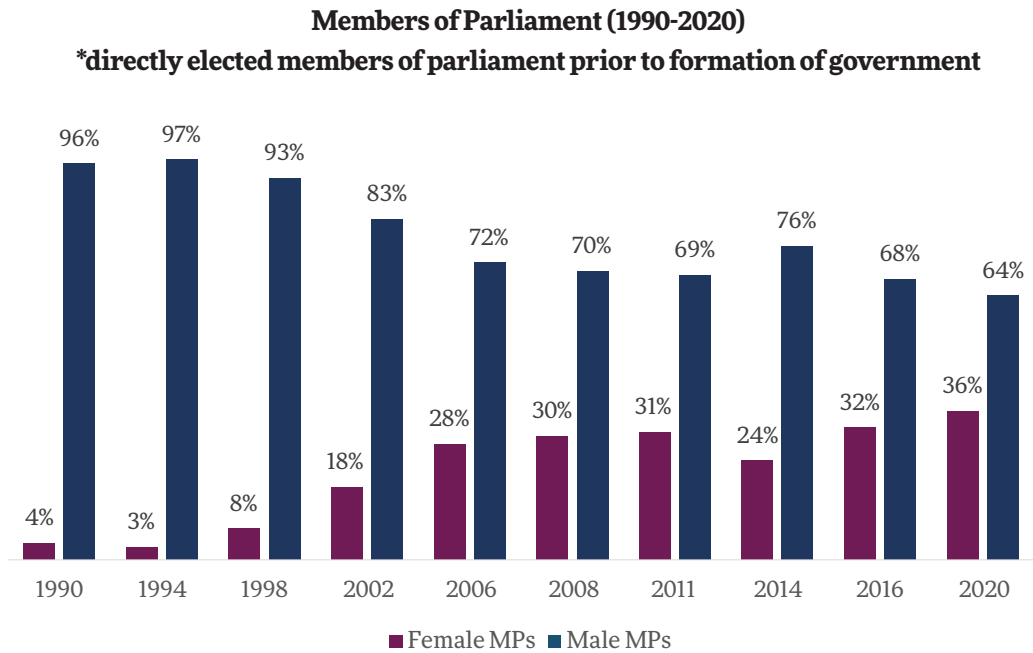
18 Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2022). Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments [Dataset]. Retrieved from <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=9&year=2022>. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023.

19 UN Women. (Updated 2023). Facts and figures: Women’s leadership and political participation. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023.

20 UN Women. (2023). Elected seats held by women in deliberative bodies of local government. Retrieved from <https://localgov.unwomen.org/sdg-551b-country-ranking>. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023.

21 D’Hondt proportional representation is a method used to allocate seats in a proportional representation electoral system. It involves dividing the total votes received by each party by a series of divisors, with seats being awarded to parties based on the highest resulting quotients. This method favors larger parties, as they tend to have higher quotients and receive more seats, while smaller parties with lower quotients may receive fewer or no seats. It aims to ensure proportional representation in legislative bodies based on the popular vote.

22 Government of North Macedonia. (2002). Election Code of North Macedonia.



The figures throughout the years show that the change of system and introduction of gender-related quotas improved women’s participation in representative roles. Furthermore, the shown figures are related to the situation right after the elections and before the formation of a government. What is also interesting to note in terms of the representation of women in parliament, is that women MPs frequently hold the positions of chair and had 50-50 participation in commissions related to foreign policy and social issues (like equal opportunities, education, social policy, and culture), and are less represented in commissions that deal with finance, economy and internal/security affairs.²³

Women’s participation in politics remains regulated by quotas in representational roles, but not in executive roles in the country. Besides the role of political parties when it comes to nominating candidates in the election process, the parties can often act as enablers or gatekeepers through their internal bodies. However, it is important to note that not all parties have the same internal bodies. With that in mind, only two of the political parties currently in parliament are led by a woman president (DOM and the Liberal Democratic Party). Additionally, internal representation in the decision-making bodies (executive committees, etc.) remains largely a male dominated area of participation, with efforts for

²³ Parliamentary Institute of the Parliament of North Macedonia. (2023). Quantification of gender sensitivity of the parliament with a focus on the legislative period from 2020-2024 and 2016-2020. Retrieved from <https://www.sobranie.mk>. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023.

equal participation between women and men remaining an exception rather than a cross-cutting goal by all political parties.²⁴ In terms of representational roles (parliament and local municipal councils), women's participation is defined in the electoral code of North Macedonia. The definition for the quotas is regulated in Article 64, which states that a list of candidates (for parliamentary or local municipal council elections) nominated by political entities participating in elections must be composed of "at least 40% of the lesser represented gender and at least one place for every three places belongs to the less represented gender, and additionally at least one place for each ten places."²⁵ As a result, 43% of all candidates in the latest parliamentary elections in 2020 were women. Only two political entities came close to having 50-50 candidacies, DUI (49.17%) and the coalition "Mozheme (We Can)" led by SDSM (48.33%).²⁶ Following the elections, a total of 43 women were elected to parliament, out of 120 places (35.82%). After the election of the new government under Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, previously elected MPs (including Zaev) transitioned into ministerial roles and the number of women in parliament rose to 37.5%.²⁷ The current number (as of January 2023) of women in parliament is 42.5% - the highest percentage of women elected parliamentarians in the country's history. This is due to the restructuring and changes in the ministerial positions and local elections in 2021, which included male members of parliament leaving office either to be ministers or candidates for mayors of municipalities.²⁸ Although the percentage of women in parliament is at its highest, the parliament has yet to see its first woman president of parliament and there are currently no women elected as vice-president of parliament. When it comes to the executive level of government, the current structure includes only five women ministers (25%), two (12%) deputy ministers and five (31%) state secretaries (Figure A).²⁹

The discrepancy between the participation of women in parliament and in the executive branch is one that has remained and grown since the quotas were first introduced and later increased. While the quotas have had the desired effect where they are applied, they have unfortunately not had the expected spillover effect in areas where quotas are not imposed.

24 Support to Electoral Reforms IFES. (2021). Women's participation in political processes in North Macedonia: A mixed picture for gender equality in the context of the 2021 local elections. Retrieved from <https://electoralreforms.mk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/ENG-Study-on-womens-participation-in-political-processes-in-North-Macedonia.pdf>. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023.

25 Government of North Macedonia. (2021). Electoral Code of North Macedonia. Retrieved from https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Sa9L6emhxw1ZVaV_8d7oK3hJ6r1usnuY/view. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023.

26 Westminster Foundation for Democracy. (2020). Youth Political Absence: Analysis of the position of young people in the parliamentary elections of 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.wfd.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Youth%20Political%20Absence%20-%20MK%20-%20web.pdf>. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023.

27 *ibid*

28 European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR). (2022). North Macedonia Report 2022. Retrieved from https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/north-macedonia-report-2022_en. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023.

29 *ibid*

Participation of Women in Local and National Politics

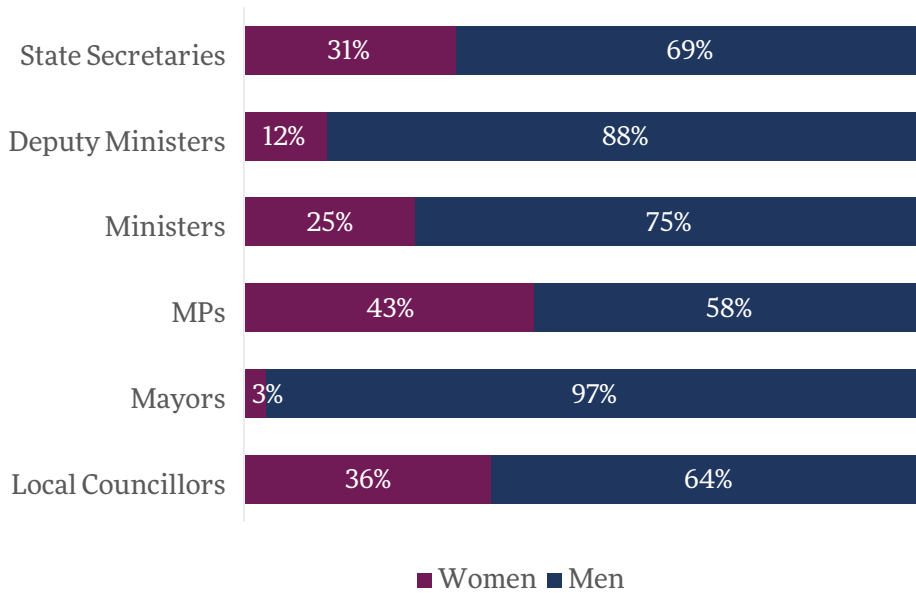


Figure A: Participation of Women in Local and National Politics

In order to address this discrepancy, there are initiatives to expand the quotas to executive positions and changes for a 50-50 quota for elected members of parliament and local councils. In March 2023, the Commission for Gender Equality in the parliament of North Macedonia concluded that there is a need for change in the Electoral code of North Macedonia, introducing a 50-50 quota for women and men, a 30% quota for “the lesser represented gender” when it comes to mayoral candidates, and a 40% quota for “the lesser represented gender” in ministerial positions³⁰. The conclusions from the session were sent to the prime minister of North Macedonia and the president of Parliament and reveal a strong commitment on part of the cross-party commission to address inequalities when it comes to women’s participation in politics.

³⁰ Commission for Gender Equality in Parliament of North Macedonia. (2023). Retrieved from <https://www.sobranie.mk/detali-na-materijal.nsp?param=a12475a8-0574-4184-b8e8-019316766402>. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023

Local Level

When it comes to the participation of women in municipal politics, the data is similar to the situation at the national level (Figure B). Although the quota from the electoral code covers lists for local municipal councils, there is a lower number of women being elected (compared to national parliament level). For the 2021 local elections that were held in North Macedonia, 45% of the candidates for local municipal council were women, and only 36.2% were elected as councilors.³¹ There are significant disparities amongst each of the 81 municipalities in terms of the percentage of women councilors. For instance, two municipalities have more than 50% of women councilors, namely the municipality of Konche with 55.6% women councilors (5 out of 9 councilors are women) and municipality of Pehcevo with 54.4% (6 out of 11 councilors are women). On the other hand, the municipalities of Plasnica (11.1% = 1 out of 9 are women) and Centar Zhupa (9.1% = 1 out of 11 are women) have the lowest participation rate of women in their local municipal councils. It is important to note that the number of seats in the municipal councils varies depending on the number of citizens in the municipality. For instance, the largest municipal council is in the City of Skopje, composed of 45 members. The smallest councils are composed of nine municipal council members (like in Plasnica, Konche and Vevchani). However, the size of each municipal council does not play a significant role in determining women participation. On the other hand, these results show one of the weaknesses of the electoral system in terms of guaranteeing women's participation. Although 45% of the candidates were women, only a small proportion of them had the chance to be elected. The reasons for this result are twofold. Firstly, women candidates were located lower on the electoral lists, and secondly, the number of political parties that participated in the elections increased, meaning that women who are lower on the candidate lists for the smaller parties had very little chance of making it on to the municipal councils.

³¹ Internal data set from local elections 2021

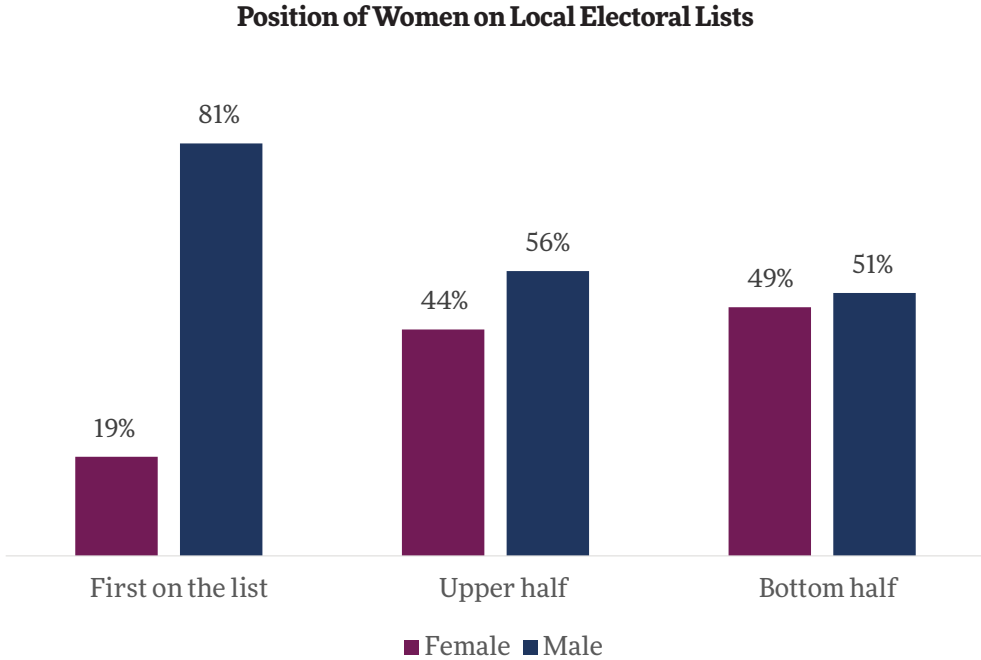


Figure B: Position of Women on Local Electoral Lists

Only 19.4% of the candidacy lists for the local councils in the 2021 local elections were led by women, which is revealing of the glass ceiling that exists for women in leading positions in politics, despite the quotas that are in place in the current electoral system. This is also evident in the election of presidents of local municipal councils, where 36.3% of all the presidents of local municipal councils from the 81 municipalities are women.

When it comes to candidates for mayors of municipalities, only 8.4% of the candidates were women.³² Only two out of 81 municipalities elected women mayors, which is 2.46% of the total number of mayors. Since there are no legal requirements and quotas for women’s participation in executive positions, the number of women nominated and elected is extremely low throughout the years, once again showing the need for more quotas for women in executive positions or other incentives for political entities to nominate more women.

³² *ibid*

METHODOLOGY

The present report's methodology is predominantly grounded on that of the baseline study conducted in 2014, with the sole distinction being the utilization of a CAWI approach to gather quantitative survey data as opposed to the CATI employed in the previous investigation. The questionnaires used in this study are largely identical to those used in 2014, with minor adjustments necessitated by changes in national and local contexts over time. A new section on 'violence against councilors' was incorporated in this year's questionnaires, marking a notable deviation from the prior iteration.

This study is based on a mixed method approach, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative instruments. The study was conducted in three stages. Firstly, we conducted desk research on domestic and international laws and by-laws and the statutes of the political parties and collected data on the current councilors and Commissions for equal opportunities in all local government units. We then conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews with current local council members, current and former women mayors and NGOs that work with the local governments. During the interviews, we explored a range of issues that could interact with or lead to gender gaps in political participation. We aimed to gain new insights and update existing knowledge on the current state of women's participation in politics. We also wanted to determine if any identified factors have persisted over time. To achieve this, we conducted an online survey using the same questionnaire as the previous study for comparability and administered it through computer-assisted web interviews (CAWI). Finally, in the last stage of the study, we conducted group discussions to present and validate results. In the IDI stage, a total of 32 participants were interviewed, while the CAWI stage covered 330 active councilors. In the stage of validation interviews, a total of 62 councilors participated in the study. The variety of methods allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the context and factors that influence political participation, and established evidence for the promotion of policy alternatives, including those targeting political parties and their internal party mechanisms.

Desktop Research

The secondary data research and analysis stage included a review of secondary sources and relevant documentation, as well as review of research methodology and revision of research instruments from the Baseline Study from 2014.

The Desk Research covered:

- Collecting and updating research papers and studies on women's participation in politics from the region and Europe
- Review of existing secondary research findings from other authors
- Collection and analysis of secondary data on women's participation in local and parliamentary elections
- Collection of Freedom of Information Act questions and answers from the political parties that have elected members of parliament and local councilors.

Online Survey

For the collection of quantitative data and implementation of the CAWI system, the research team relied on the web-based platform LimeSurvey installed on Reactor's data servers. The survey contained 49 questions, separated into 7 question groups.

The first part of the questionnaire included demographics and questions about duration of party membership, past and present positions within the party and whether family members were also active in the party. The goal was to measure the level of activity within their party and whether family members influenced and/or enabled their involvement in local politics.

The second part of the questionnaire covered the nomination and selection process for running for office. In this section councilors indicated whether they were aware beforehand that they would be nominated, whether they had aspirations to become councilors and how satisfied they were with becoming a counselor. This section of the questionnaire also measured the support councilors received from their family members and their parties.

The third part of the questionnaire looked at what motivated councilors to go into politics, as well as their future ambitions to either run for council again or progress into higher political positions, such as mayor or member of parliament. The goal was to compare whether women and men are differently motivated when it comes to running for office, as

well as to identify the differences in aspirations for future participation in politics. In these questions councilors were required to rate how likely they were to be elected for mayor, a member of parliament or a minister, should they run. Furthermore, councilors were asked to rate their own work in the council and how other councilors perceive their work within the council. This section also covered perception of personal power or lack of power to influence decision-making processes in the municipality, with the goal of determining differences in perceived political power between women and men in the councils.

The survey next covered general attitudes about gender equality, as well as whether councilors believe that laws are effective in improving the status of women in politics and what they believe to be the reasons for the small percentage of women mayors in the country.

The last part of the survey probed experiences with violence during their work as councilors.

In terms of data collection, we created two distinct links to the survey. One version of the survey was created with the so-called “token” approach, which allows for email addresses of participants in the survey to be uploaded to the CAWI system. This enabled us to send automatic email invitations and reminders to the participants in the survey. Secondly, an additional link was created which was not connected to the emails of the participants and thus could be sent directly by phone to the survey participants. The second approach with direct phone dispersion of the survey was due to the slow and low response rate of the participants with the first approach and the unavailability of the email addresses of participants from certain municipalities. Furthermore, we noticed that only a small number of survey participants use their publicly available email addresses.

The data collection process with automated emails started in mid-October 2022 and lasted until the end of January 2023. A total of five reminders were sent to the participants until the end date for the collection of data. A total of 1024 survey participants were contacted. In terms of the second approach, a copy of the survey was sent out in mid-December 2022 and the collection of data, with this type of approach, lasted until the end of January 2023.

Semi-structured In-depth Interviews

Qualitative data was collected by conducting face-to-face formal semi-structured interviews with current councilors (both women and men), current and former mayors (all women) and local NGOs that work with local governments. In total, 32 interviewees took part in this stage of the research, of whom 21 were women and 11 were men. The interviewed councilors came from all regions: Skopje (11), East (5), Pelagonia (4), Polog (4), Vardar (4), Southeast (3), and Northeast (1).

The face-to-face interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and were conducted by a total of four researchers, three of whom were women. The collection of qualitative data aimed to measure the motivating factors in becoming a counselor, the perceived influence of councilors in the decision-making processes, perceptions and views of gender equality in general and within the local council, as well as to explore personal experiences with violence throughout their work as councilors. The interviews were conducted with current councilors from the four major political parties, as well as members of smaller parties and coalition partners. The interviews were conducted mainly online, using Zoom ; however, it was always at a time that best suited the respondents. Prior to starting with the interviews, researchers informed participants of Reactor’s data protection policies under which this survey was conducted, including that information obtained is confidential and anonymous and only used for research purposes. Permission was requested by researchers and, where permitted, the interview was audio recorded (all of the interviews apart from one were audio recorded). Once concluded, the interviews were immediately transcribed into interview notes.

Research Sample and Structure

Contact emails of councilors were collected by submitting a formal request to the municipality and checking the websites of those who did not respond to the request. At the end of the sampling, a total of six municipalities could not be contacted or refused to provide researchers with contact information for councilors. From the total of 1.347 councilors, we gathered available email contacts for a total of 730, out of which 273 (or 37%) were women councilors. Attempts were made to contact all of the councilors; however, due to a large number of no-answers or refusal to participate in the survey, the final result was a total sample of 330 responses. In the sample 51% of the respondents are women, i.e., they are overrepresented. The sample, however, is large

enough to allow for meaningful generalizations, with a margin of error at 5%.

Geographical distribution: The distribution of the sample is representative of the current elected officials at the local level. They come from the eight statistical regions in Macedonia: 26.7% are from the Skopje Region, 14.8% from the Vardar region, 12.7% from the East, 11.2% from Southeast, 10.6% from Pelagonia, another 10.6% from Northeast, 6.7% from Southwest, and another 6.7% from Polog.

Gender and political party affiliation: In the sample 167 (50.6%) were women councilors and 163 (49.4%) men councilors. The sample included current councilors, most of which were representing one of the three major political parties. Namely, 135 (40.9%) councilors are members of VMRO-DPMNE, 82 councilors (24.8%) from SDSM, and 26 councilors (7.9%) from DUI. The remaining councilors are members of smaller political parties (51, or 15.5%) or are not members of a party (independent) (36, or 10.9%)

Validation Meetings

The last stage of the research consisted of validation meetings held in all six electoral districts. Municipalities were selected according to geographical positioning, easy access to neighboring municipalities and demographic indicators. The validation meetings were held on municipal premises in the municipalities of Skopje, Kumanovo, Ohrid, Kavadarci, Tetovo, and Stip. Additionally, the Skopje region was further covered in a gathering of local municipal councilors discussing violence against women in politics that was held in Skopje. One of these panels was devoted to the impact of women in politics, where preliminary findings were presented and discussed.

At each of the regional validation meetings, we invited councilors from surrounding municipalities. Participants were invited by e-mail and all meetings were held during working hours.

In total, 62 councilors took part in the validation meetings, representing most of the political parties in North Macedonia. Each validation meeting lasted approximately two hours and included an introduction of the research by NDI representatives and Reactor researchers, followed by a presentation of the key preliminary findings divided into five categories. Once the presentation of key findings was completed, each finding was discussed by participants and stakeholders. The discussion part of the validation meetings lasted approximately one hour per meeting. Participants presented their own experiences and discussed to what extent they agree or disagree

with the presented findings, offering their personal opinions and views both on the findings and their political and social environments. The validation meetings concluded with suggestions from the councilors on scalable recommendations and development interventions on making equality count.

RESULTS

Most Likely to Succeed: The Demographics of Locally Elected Officials

Age

It is noteworthy that a significant proportion of councilors are below the age of 50, with as many as three out of four (75%) falling into this category. Notably, gender differences exist in the age distribution of councilors, with women more likely to become councilors after reaching the age of 50, in comparison to their male counterparts. While the observed difference is not statistically significant, it aligns with the broader findings that suggest women’s involvement in politics is often contingent on having a record of active participation within the party and raising children who have reached school age. Specifically, over one-third (32%) of women councilors are over the age of 50, a trend which is not mirrored in the male councilor population, where only one in five (19%) fall into this age bracket. (Figure 1)

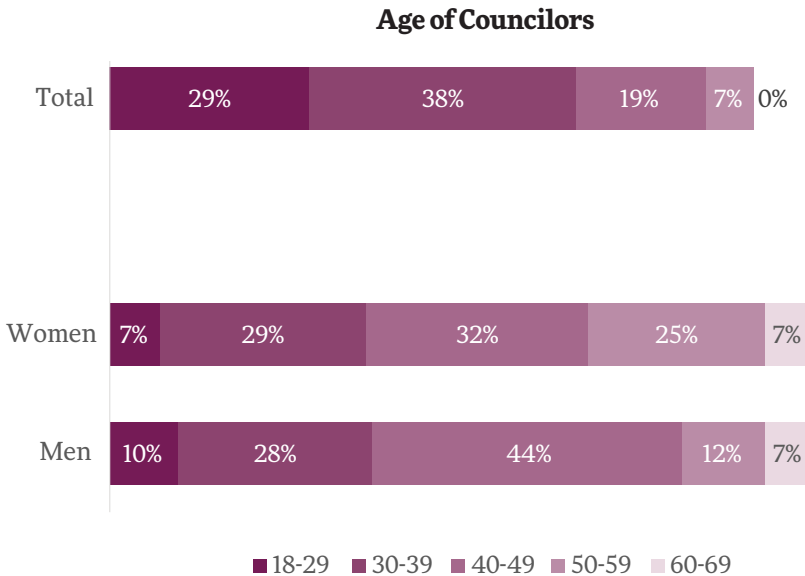


Figure 1: Age of Councilors, in total and by gender

Education

The data suggests that women seeking to enter the political sphere are required to hold a higher level of education than their male counterparts. Specifically, the figures indicate that male councilors are more likely than their female counterparts to possess an undergraduate degree, with only 11% of women compared to over a quarter of men (28%) completing their education at this milestone (Figure 2).

It is noteworthy that the overwhelming majority of councilors possess advanced educational qualifications, with 80% of councilors holding a university degree or higher. However, it is striking to note that women who serve in political roles are significantly more highly educated than their male colleagues. A staggering 89% of female councilors hold a university degree or higher, compared to 72% of their male counterparts.

This significant discrepancy between the educational attainment of women and men in political roles may indicate a broader societal trend, whereby women are expected to demonstrate higher levels of competency in order to overcome systemic barriers to their entry and success in the political arena.

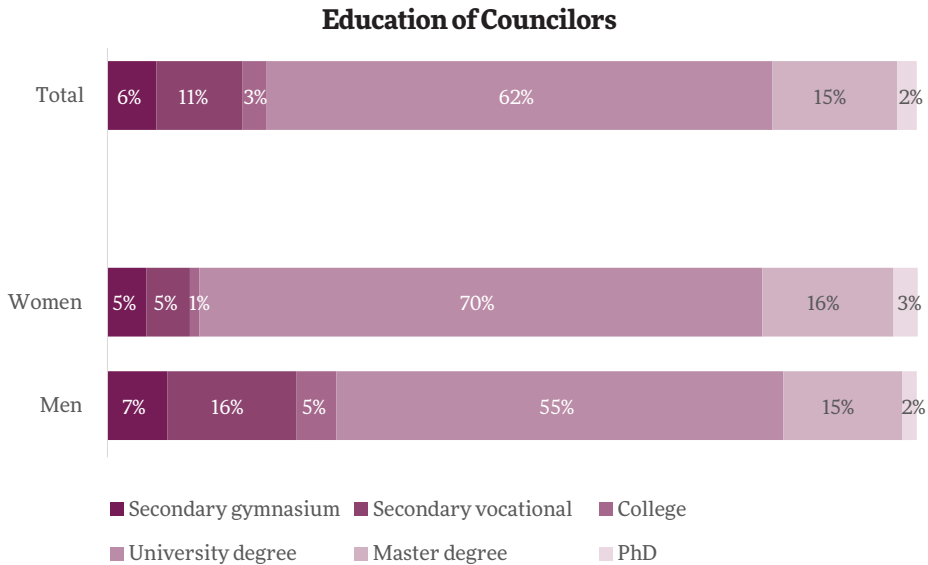


Figure 2: Education of councilors, in total and by gender

HAS ANYTHING CHANGED?

In parallel with the latest findings in 2023, it appears that women have historically been required to attain a higher level of education than their male counterparts in order to achieve representation in the political sphere. Specifically, in 2015, while an impressive 79% of female councilors possessed a university degree or higher, only approximately half of male councilors (54%) had achieved this level of educational attainment.

Family Status

Marital status itself does not appear to be a significant predictor of the likelihood of running for a council position. A closer examination of the statistics reveals that the majority of councilors (76%) are married, with no notable variations in this regard based on gender, age, or ethnicity (Figure 3).

Moreover, a significant proportion of councilors (80%) are parents, indicating that family responsibilities do not preclude participation in political activities. However, the data also highlights a gender disparity with women who have young children facing greater obstacles in pursuing a career in local politics. Based on the data provided, we can see that a higher percentage of men (37%) than women (19%) have a child at pre-school age. This data and previous studies suggest that there are differences in parenting roles and responsibilities between men and women³³³⁴³⁵. It could also indicate that women may be more likely to take on caregiving responsibilities for young children, while men may be more likely to continue working during this time and thus, be encouraged to get involved in local politics as well.

33 State Statistical Office. (2014/2015). Time Use Survey [Dataset]. Retrieved from https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziPublikacija_en.aspx?id=58&rbr=599. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023.

34 Reactor - Research into Action. (2021). Men In Care (Mic): Caring Masculinities in North Macedonia - Country Report. Retrieved from https://reactor.org.mk/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/11/menincare_web_en.pdf. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023

35 Reactor - Research in Action on behalf of UNICEF. (2020). Experiences and Attitudes About Distance Learning. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/northmacedonia/media/6881/file>. Last Accessed: May 8, 2023.

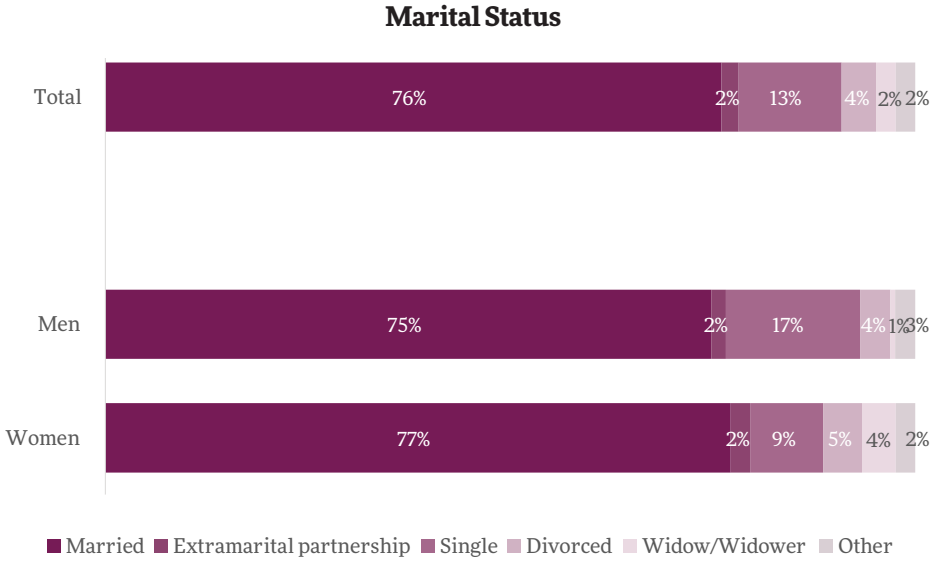


Figure 3: Marital status of councilors, in total and by gender

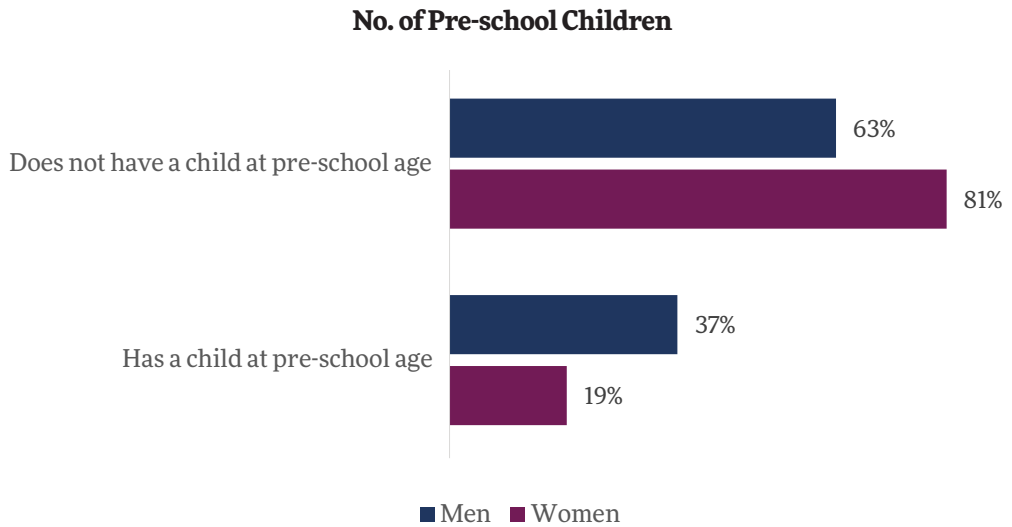


Figure 4: Number of pre-school children, by gender

Both male and female councilors are equally likely to have employed partners, with 84% of male councilors and 82% of female councilors reporting having employed spouses (Figure 5). However, the employment status of the male councilors' spouses may be influenced by party membership. While not statistically significant, DPMNE male councilors are more likely to have employed spouses compared to their male colleagues from other parties, while SDSM and DUI male councilors are more likely to have unemployed spouses. Interestingly, party membership does not seem to have any impact on the employment status of female councilors' partners.

Age does not appear to be a factor in the employment status of spouses, but education level does play a role. Councilors with higher levels of education are more likely to have employed spouses. For instance, only 38% of male councilors with basic secondary education have employed wives, compared to 93% of those with university degrees. Similarly, 63% of female councilors with basic secondary education have employed partners, while 84% of those with university degrees do.

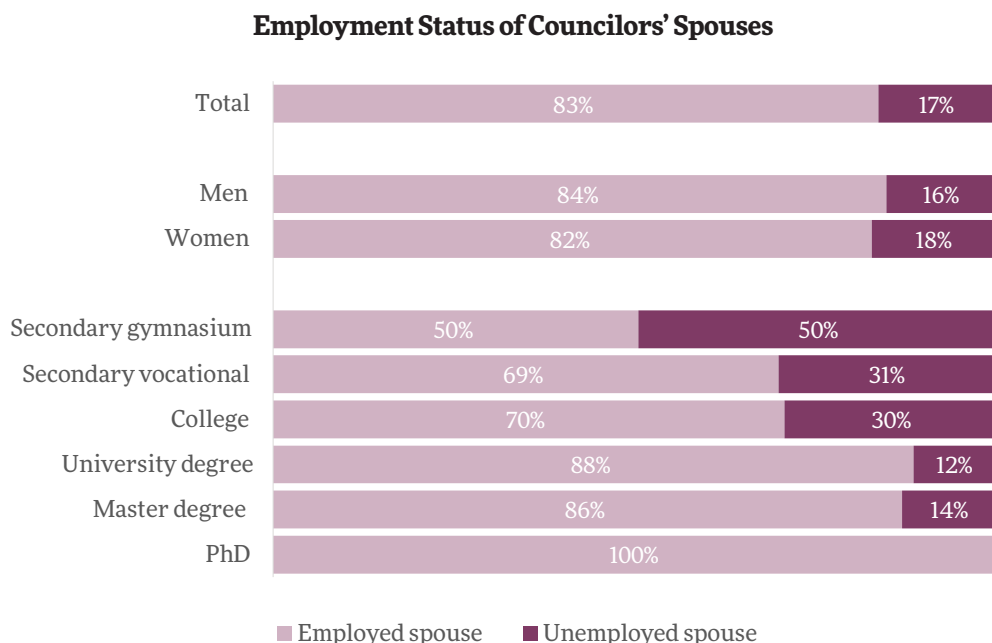


Figure 5: Employment status of councilors' spouses, in total and by gender and education

HAS ANYTHING CHANGED?

In contrast to the present research, the 2015 study revealed a disparity between female and male councilors in terms of marital status, parental responsibilities, and the employment status of their partners. Specifically, female councilors were found to be less likely to be married, had a lower average number of children, and were more likely to have partners who were employed compared to their male counterparts. Interestingly, the current study echoes the 2015 findings regarding the age of children - female councilors were still less likely to have pre-school-aged children than their male colleagues in both studies.

Proximity to Political Power

One aspect that influences the motivation of councilors to seek political office is their proximity to political power. Among municipal councilors in Macedonia, female councilors are more likely to have familial ties with active or retired politicians compared to their male counterparts. Specifically, 12% of female councilors have a family member who currently or previously held political office or had a high-ranking position within a political party, while this amounts to 7% for male councilors (Figure 6). Although the difference is not statistically significant, it is indicative of how having a familial tie to established political figures is more beneficial for female councilors than for male councilors. Furthermore, male family members are more likely to have held or currently hold a political position among the family members of Macedonian councilors.

% of Councilors Who Have Family Members Involved in Politics

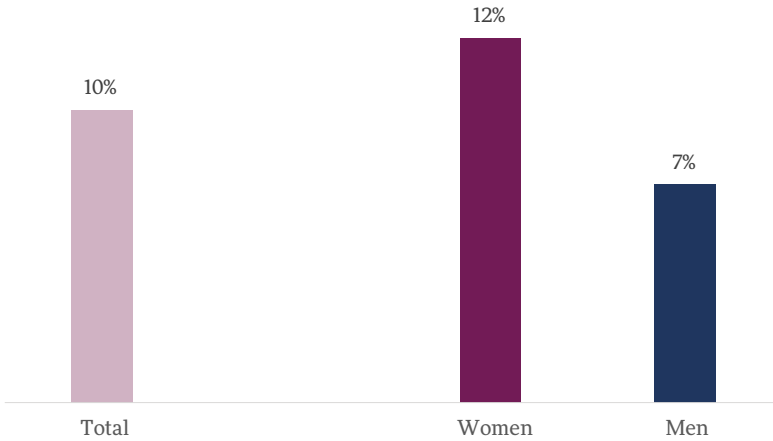


Figure 6: Percentage of councilors who have family members involved in politics, in total and by gender.

Female councilors are most likely to have a political connection with their spouse or father, while male councilors are most commonly connected to their father. This is unsurprising as, in the world of politics, it is not uncommon for female politicians who break the glass ceiling to be related to established male politicians. When a female candidate has familial ties to a male politician, she may benefit from established political networks and endorsements that would be otherwise inaccessible to her. Additionally, the political aspirations of wives and daughters of male politicians may be nurtured from an early age, granting them unique exposure to the political world and greater access to influential individuals.

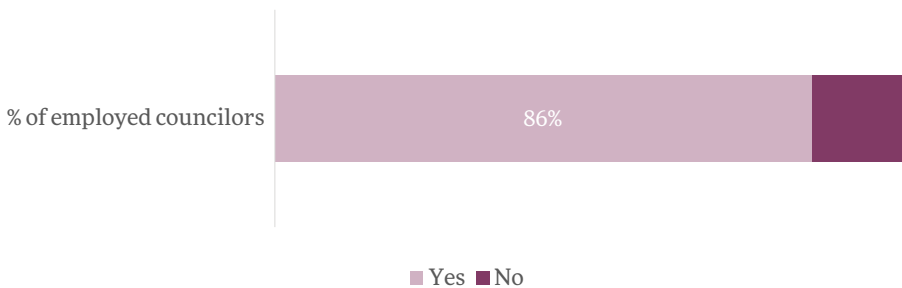
HAS ANYTHING CHANGED?

Similarly, the 2015 study revealed that female councilors were positioned in closer proximity to political power than their male counterparts. Notably, 14% of women and 8% of men had familial connections to politicians, held political office, or held a high-ranking position within a political party.

Employment

Despite most of the councilors being employed (86%), the data presented here highlights the significant gender disparities in the distribution of employment across the state administration and privately owned enterprises. According to the data provided, women are significantly more likely to work in state administration than in privately owned enterprises. More precisely, the data shows that nearly 78% of women are employed in the state administration sector, while the remaining 22% work in privately owned enterprises. In contrast, men exhibit a greater tendency towards working in privately owned enterprises in comparison to women, with 36% employed in this sector, while 64% are employed in state administration. This gender discrepancy in employment sector preferences may be attributed to various factors, including social expectations, differences in education and training, as well as the culture and work environment of the two sectors (Figure 7).

The data presented also shows a clear trend in terms of age groups and their respective employment sectors, although not statistically significant due to the small sample size within each individual cell. The younger age groups, 18-29 and 30-39, are more likely to be employed in privately owned enterprises (53% and 32%, respectively), while the state administration sector seems to be more attractive to the older age groups. Indeed, as age increases, so does the likelihood of being employed in the state administration sector, with 77% of those in the 50-59 age group and a striking 83% of those in the 60-69 age group employed in the state administration sector. The trend is a bit less pronounced in the 40-49 age group, where 73% are employed in the state administration sector, and 27% in privately owned enterprises.



Type of Employment by Gender, Age and Education

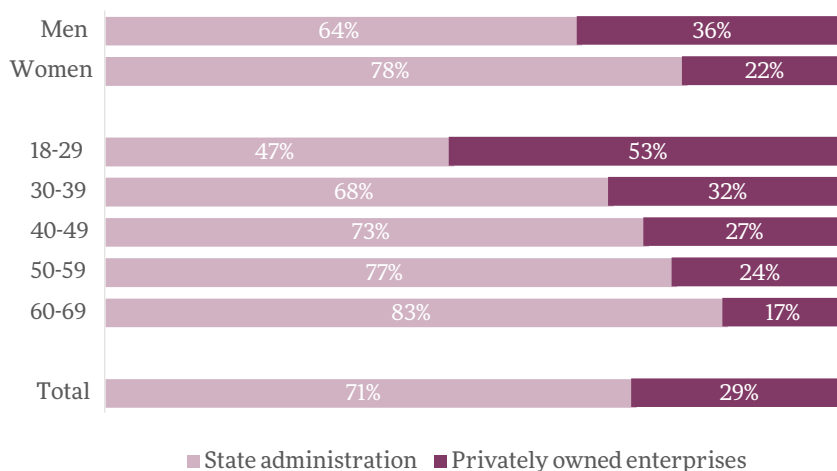


Figure 7: Type of councilors' employment by gender, age and education

HAS ANYTHING CHANGED?

In a similar vein, the 2015 study indicated a lack of disparity between female and male councilors with regards to their participation in the labor market. Notably, a vast majority of women (as was the case in the present study) were employed in the state administration sector.

The Beginnings: Recruitment and the Road to Political Office

Motivation for Candidacy

Drawing upon the collected data, we can conclude that the decision to become a candidate for council was primarily a joint decision between the candidate and the party that endorsed them, as this was the case for 59% of candidates covered in the survey. (Figure 8). There are no significant differences based on the gender, age, educational background, or political party of the councilor. Nevertheless, as much as a third of the councilors reported lacking prior knowledge of their candidacy nomination, which may bear further investigation (Figure 9).

Whose idea was the candidacy?

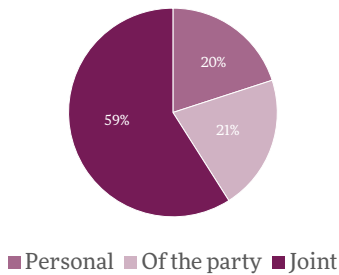


Figure 8: Who made the decision for the councilor’s candidacy?

Did you know you would be nominated?

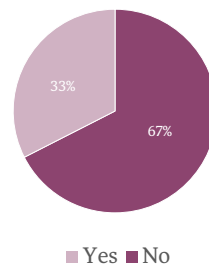


Figure 9: Knowledge of the nomination

The findings regarding the underlying rationale for candidacy are largely consistent among the councilors who were interviewed. While many cited their desire to serve their constituents as a primary motivation (as we will elaborate below), female candidates were more likely to report that their decision to run for office was driven by their political party’s objective of achieving gender balance through the implementation of quotas.

“To be honest, I never really thought about running for office. The idea was actually suggested to me by the president of the local political party organization. He suggested that I could be a good candidate.”

Specifically, he proposed that I be listed as the top female candidate on the party's roster.' - Female representative

The main motivators for candidacy among councilors can vary, but the data indicates that trust in their ability to contribute to improving the living conditions in their municipality was the most significant factor, with 33% of councilors citing this as their primary motivator. This motivation was consistent across both genders, with 34% of men and 31% of women sharing this sentiment (Figure 10).

The desire to change the current state of the municipality was the second most common motivator, with 28% of councilors indicating this as their reason for running for office. There are no significant differences between men and women regarding this reason for running (29% of men and 27% of women).

The opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process on a local level was also a significant motivator for candidacy, with 25% of councilors indicating this as their primary reason for running. Women were insignificantly more likely than men to express this motivation, with 27% of women compared to 22% of men citing this as their main motivator. A smaller percentage of councilors indicated that the desire and/or need to help their party was their main motivator for candidacy, with only 5% of councilors expressing this sentiment. Men and women shared this motivation to a similar degree, with 4% of men and 6% of women indicating this as their reason for running.

Finally, only a small percentage of councilors indicated that the opportunity to improve the living conditions for the youth was their primary motivator, with only 4% of councilors expressing this sentiment. Women were as likely as men to express this motivation, with 5% of women compared to 3% of men indicating this as their main motivator.

It is worth noting that while there were some differences in the motivators expressed by men and women, particularly in relation to the desire for change and the opportunity to be involved in decision-making processes at the local level, these differences were not statistically significant. This indicates that the motivators for candidacy were generally consistent across genders, with trust in one's ability to contribute to the municipality being the primary driving force for both men and women.

Main Motivator for Candidacy

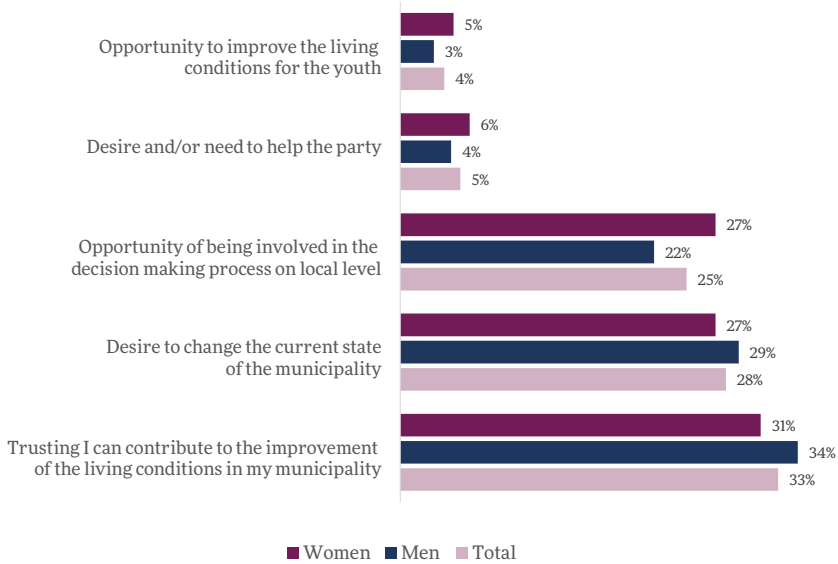


Figure 10: Main motivation behind candidacy, in total and by gender

The motivation for candidacy among interviewed councilors is quite similar to those who filled out the online survey – some wanted to help the municipality and the citizens and make their own contribution to the development of their surroundings, while others expressed their disappointment with the current state of affairs as a main motivator for running.

‘Our motivation for entering politics was born out of a sense of disillusionment with the policies of the existing parties. They had failed to deliver on their promises and lacked the capacity and willingness to implement meaningful change. We felt a responsibility to sound the alarm and take action by seeking election to council. Our hope was to find new solutions and address the pressing issues that the existing parties had failed to tackle.’ – Male representative

‘My motivation for getting involved in politics was driven largely by a desire to effect change in my country. Conversations with my child, who expressed a lack of faith in the ability of the city and the country to function properly, were particularly influential in this regard. The

idea that my child might want to leave the country due to a lack of opportunity and progress was a wake-up call for me, and it inspired me to take action and work towards creating a better future for all.’ – Female representative.

However, some of the female councilors claimed their motivation to be inspiring other women to take action and advocate for their rights.

‘I led a women’s forum in my municipality and felt responsible for advocating for women’s rights. When I ran for office, there were more women than men on the list, which motivated me to encourage other women to participate, even though it’s tougher for women in rural areas where men often have an advantage.’ – Female representative

Just over two-thirds of councilors (69%) said that they were interested in political office prior to their nomination, with women displaying a greater interest in local political involvement than men. This difference, however, is not statistically significant (Figure 11).

Examining councilors’ reactions to their nominations, both men and women were likely to say they were happy to be nominated (48% each), but other reactions displayed interesting differences. Specifically, men were slightly more likely to report a neutral reaction, potentially reflecting the unspoken societal expectation for men to avoid public displays of emotion. Conversely, women were more likely to express a strong sense of responsibility associated with the role, and more likely to be surprised or have negative feelings associated with the nomination (Figure 12).

Desire to Become Councilor

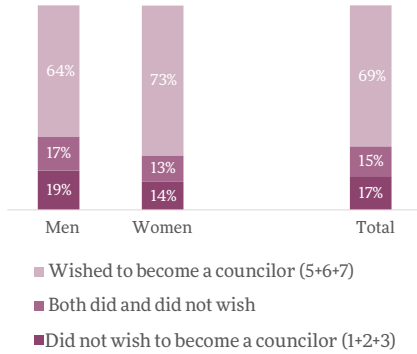


Figure 11: Desire to become councilor, in total and by gender

Reaction Upon Finding Out They Were Nominated

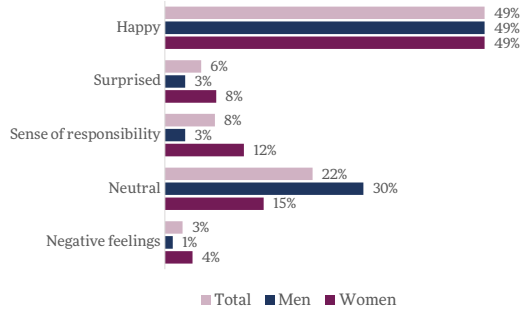


Figure 12: Reaction upon finding out about the nomination, in total and by gender

HAS ANYTHING CHANGED?

In 2015, female councilors were more likely than their male counterparts to report that the decision to run for office was instigated by their political party, and they were less likely to have been informed about their nomination beforehand. Subsequently, women tended to express greater levels of happiness and surprise than men upon discovering their nomination. Notably, both male and female candidates were primarily motivated by the desire to improve their community and effect positive change, with no notable gender differences in this regard.

Family Support

The data shows that the vast majority of respondents (81%) reported that their family fully supported their candidacy for council. Both women and men reported equally high levels of full support from their families, with 81% of women and 81% of men indicating full support. Additionally, a small percentage (14%) of respondents stated that most of their family supported their candidacy, with similar percentages for women and men. Only a very small percentage (4%) reported mixed support from their family, with women slightly more likely to report this than men (5% vs. 3%). Overall, the data indicates that the majority of respondents received strong support from their families when they decided to run for council (Figure 13).

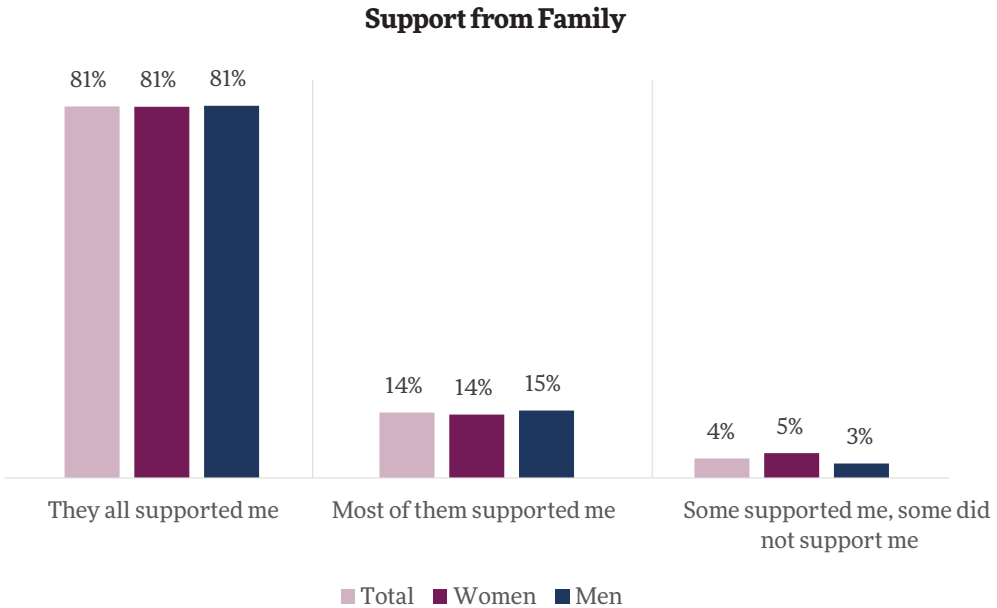


Figure 13: Support received by councilors' family, in total and by gender.

While both the quantitative and qualitative research revealed that most councilors received support from their families, the qualitative interviews revealed that many female councilors were cautioned by their immediate family about the potential consequences of engaging in political activity. Specifically, female participants were more likely to mention concerns regarding a reduction in time devoted to family matters, an issue that was not raised among male participants. Moreover, several female councilors reported a more equal division of unpaid household labor following their appointment, whereas none of the men mentioned any changes to their domestic responsibilities, suggesting that these

duties did not occupy a significant amount of their time prior to their appointment as councilors.

‘My family supported me 100%. I couldn’t have done this without them. My husband even took on more of the household tasks so I could have more time to devote on my work.’ – Female representative

‘I had great support from my family. My children are already grown though, and I have no obligations around them. If they were younger, I doubt I would have made the decision so easily.’ – Female representative

“I was told not to run for council because it was assumed I wouldn’t have time for my family if I won. It was very unfair.” – Female representat

HAS ANYTHING CHANGED?

In line with the 2023 findings, there were no notable differences in the support that female and male councilors received from their families in the 2015 study.

Party Support

The majority of respondents reported receiving support from their party when they announced their candidacy for council. More specifically, 53% of respondents stated that their party fully supported their decision, with a significantly higher percentage of men (62%) than women (45%) receiving complete support. Meanwhile, 37% of respondents reported receiving support from most members of their party, with a similar distribution between men (34%) and women (41%). A smaller percentage (8%) reported mixed reactions, with a significantly higher proportion of women (13%) than men (3%) experiencing this response. Finally, only 1% of respondents stated that most of their party members were against their decision to run for council, with no significant differences between men and women (Figure 14).

Overall, the data suggest that the majority of respondents received support from their parties, with men slightly more likely to receive complete support. This gender difference

in mixed support could be due to a variety of factors, including gender bias or stereotypes about women's leadership abilities, or differences in the types of issues or policies that women and men prioritize in their campaigns. It is also possible that women face more barriers and gatekeeping within their parties due to systemic gender inequality in politics, such as a lack of access to political networks and resources, or discriminatory attitudes and practices.

Support from Political Party

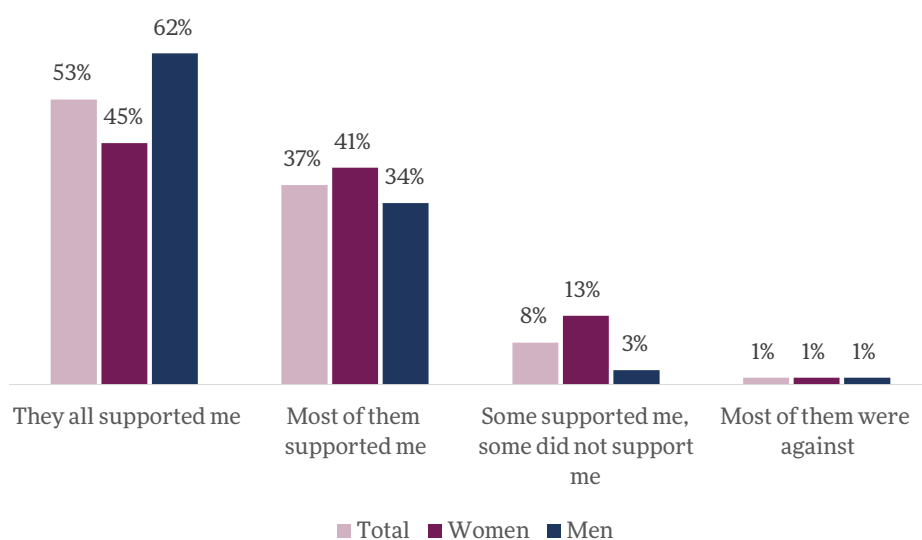


Figure 14: Support received by councilors' party, in total and by gender.

This finding aligns with the results obtained from the in-depth interviews, which shed further light on the issue. The interviews revealed that male councilors more frequently reported having the full support of their party, while female councilors were more likely to report encountering resistance from party members both before and during their mandate. Similarly, female mayors encountered comparable experiences, having gained support during their initial election, but requiring considerably more effort to acquire support for their second term. These mayors attribute this loss of support to their reluctance to engage in informal agreements for official processes within the municipality, as well as their insistence that procedures be carried out in a formal manner.

'My work as mayor met my expectations, as I was already familiar with the challenging circumstances facing the municipality as a council

member. However, I was surprised by the way the mayor’s office was managed, which added unnecessary burden due to corruption and non-compliance with legal regulations. As a woman mayor, I faced serious opposition when trying to enforce the law and uphold my principles, which led to increased condemnation from some quarters. I believe this was due to their desire for money and positions that they could not achieve while adhering to the standards I stood for.’ – Female representative

‘I wanted to work transparently, but there was a group of people that did not like that, and they spread rumors that I was bad at my job and blamed it on my gender.’ – Female representative

HAS ANYTHING CHANGED?

Consistent with the results of the 2023 study, the 2015 investigation similarly documented noteworthy gender disparities in the level of support received by councilors from their respective political parties. Specifically, male councilors were more likely than their female counterparts to receive comprehensive support from their party.

Workplace Support

In the context of workplace dynamics, the issue of workplace support was raised only through in-depth semi-structured interviews. While the vast majority of councilors reported receiving ample support from their employers, a closer examination reveals that such support is often conditional and may vary depending on the gender of the councilor. Men, it seems, are more likely to receive unconditional support, whereas women may not enjoy the same level of backing.

Interestingly, one former mayor reported a curious case wherein despite receiving full employer support to run for mayor, she found herself unemployed upon leaving politics, as her previous position had been filled. Among councilors, it has been observed that the most pressing issue occurs when they are employed in state administration and have directors who support the opposing party. Such circumstances can result in a range of work-related

problems, such as having vacation days taken away, or being openly discouraged from fulfilling their duties as councilors.

'I encounter problems when I need to attend a council meeting during my work hours for a few hours, and my director does not permit it. Instead, I'm forced to use my vacation days for such events. The situation is ironic, as my director was a councilor in the past and enjoyed much more flexibility in attending meetings without any limitations or restrictions.' – Female representative

'I have issues specifically with my manager. He told me, face-to-face, that he doesn't like the idea of me being a councilor.' – Male representative
'I really had to find creative ways to campaign, but also to manage my professional duties. Although after being elected I have rights under the Labor Law and I should be able to get leave whenever there is a meeting of the council or work related to my position, in practice I could not fully use that right. In 2017 when I was first elected, the then president of the council sent a letter to my employer to inform him that I am a member of several commissions, and that I can only take approved leave from work if there are meetings for those committees or the council itself. However, being a representative is not only being in those meetings, but also meeting my constituents.' – Female representative

Political Career

Political experience

Regarding previous involvement in political parties, it appears that women are generally required to have somewhat longer tenure than men. Specifically, men have an easier path towards securing a council position within the first decade of their party membership (24% became councilors in the first 10 years), while women often require a minimum of 10 to 15 years of active participation before being considered (32% of women became councilors after 10 to 15 years of party activity). Although not statistically significant, this difference in political experience suggests that women face higher expectations and requirements compared to men in their political involvement (Figure 15).

This observation is further supported by extensive interviews and validation meetings with current council members, who have shared their experiences that women must exert significantly more effort within the party to earn recognition and placement on councilor lists, compared to their male counterparts. It is worth noting that this disparity may be influenced by the presence of separate women's groups within the party, such as forums and unions, which aim to integrate women into an otherwise male-dominated party structure. However, these groups may primarily function as organizers of activities for promoting party ideology and action, without substantial involvement in the political activities of the main organizational bodies.

The data highlights an interesting distinction between councilors from different political parties, particularly in their levels of political experience prior to being nominated as councilors. The SDSM and DUI parties appear to require significantly less political experience, with councilors who have been politically active for less than 5 years making up a larger proportion (15% for SDSM and 19% for DUI) compared to councilors from VMRO DPMNE (5%). On the other hand, most councilors from DUI (58%) have been politically active for 16-20 years before becoming councilors. In contrast, councilors from VMRO DPMNE and SDSM were more often politically active for 11-15 years before becoming councilors (33% for VMRO DPMNE and 29% for SDSM). This difference in political experience could indicate differing party priorities, such as a focus on youth representation for SDSM and DUI or rewarding long-term party loyalty for VMRO-DPMNE. However, while these reasons may seem plausible, it is important to conduct further investigation to ascertain the actual reasons behind this variance, in order to arrive at valid and reliable conclusions.

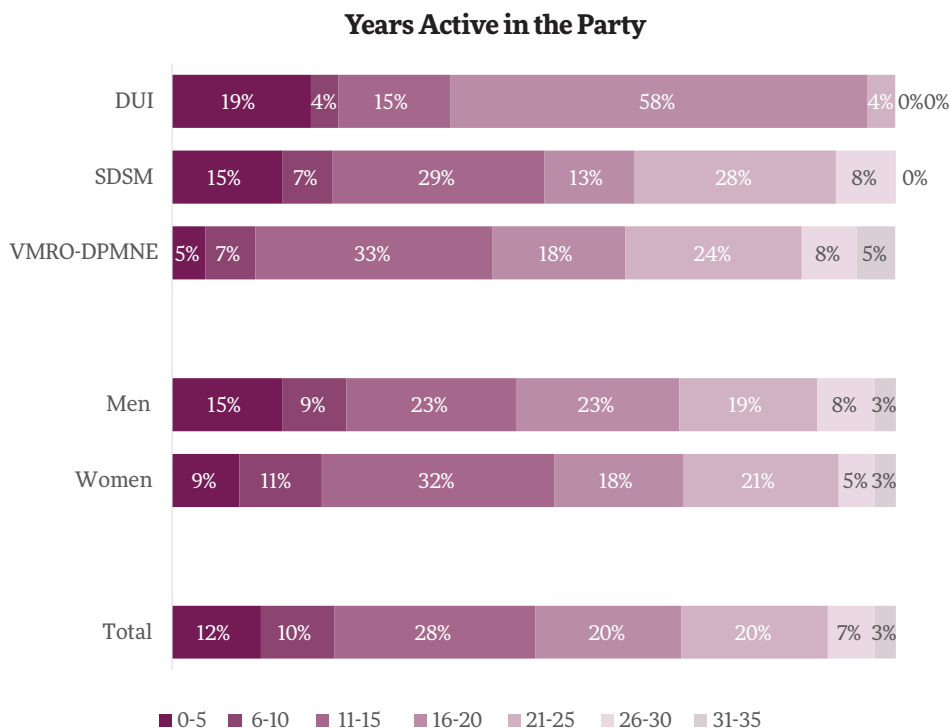


Figure 15: Length of councilors' previous political activity, in total, by gender and by political party

There appears to be a gender disparity among councilors in terms of their leadership roles within political parties. Male councilors are more frequently found in presidential positions, whereas their female counterparts tend to occupy various other membership roles within party bodies. This trend highlights potential barriers for women in obtaining top leadership positions within political parties, despite their active participation in other areas (Figure 16).

More specifically, it shows that men are more likely to hold positions of power, such as the President of the local organizational unit, with 67% of those in this role being male. Women, on the other hand, are less likely to be leaders of such a unit, with only one-third (33%) of those in this role being female.

In terms of gender balance, the data shows that membership in executive boards is the most evenly split, with 50% of members being male and 50% being female. However, there is still a slight (although statistically insignificant) gender gap when it comes to membership in the party convention, with 58% of members being male and 42% being female.

RESULTS

Looking specifically at youth organizations, men are more likely to hold leadership positions such as the President of the youth organization, with 65% of those in this role being male. The gender balance is slightly more even when it comes to the executive board of the youth organization, with 52% of members being male and 48% being female.

Finally, when it comes to committees, men are only slightly more likely to be members, with 53% of those in this role being male and 47% being female.

Overall, this data shows that men still hold a larger proportion of positions of power within political parties, with a notable gender imbalance in leadership roles. These findings highlight the ongoing need for increased efforts to promote gender diversity and representation within political parties, particularly in leadership positions.

Have you had any of the following functions in your political party?				
		Men	Women	Total
President of local organizational unit	Count	50	25	75
	%	67%	33%	100%
	% within gender	30.7%	15.0%	22.7%
Member of the executive board	Count	39	39	78
	%	50%	50%	100%
	% within gender	23.9%	23.4%	23.6%
Member of the congress	Count	41	30	71
	%	58%	42%	100%
	% within gender	25.2%	18.0%	21.5%

Have you had any of the following functions in your political party?				
		Men	Women	Total
Member of the executive board of the youth organization	Count	17	16	33
	%	52%	48%	100%
	% within gender	10.4%	9.6%	10.0%
President of the youth organization	Count	15	8	23
	%	65%	35%	100%
	% within gender	9.2%	4.8%	7.0%
Member of a committee	Count	10	9	19
	%	52.6%	47.4%	100.0%
	% within gender	6.1%	5.4%	5.8%
President of union/forum of women	Count	0	45	45
	%	0	100%	100
	% within gender	0	26.9%	13.6%

Figure 16: Party functions held by councilors, in total and by gender.

The aforementioned findings were supported by qualitative discoveries that provided additional insights into the gender disparity in the realm of politics. Specifically, it was found that women were more inclined to report being encouraged to engage in collective political roles with limited authoritative influence, despite their party's claims of supporting women in politics. This was corroborated by three notable incidents that stand out in this regard.

The first instance involved an initiative for a female president of the party youth organization in a particular municipality, which was supported by a group of young women who were party members. However, their efforts were met with opposition from the majority male membership, who insisted that the role should be filled by a young man due to the supposed danger and physical demands that the position entails.

Another example highlighted the experiences of a female councilor who had applied for a position in the higher executive echelons of the party. Despite being the only female candidate, she was warned during the interview that the position was reserved for a man, thereby implying that her candidacy was pointless and implicitly enhancing the systemic barriers that women continue to face in politics.

Lastly, a third female councilor recounted her experience of being perceived as too active by her male colleagues in the council and, as a form of retribution, being assigned the presidency of the Committee for Equal Opportunities. However, she used this opportunity to develop the work of the committee, resulting in the highest number of members among all committees in the municipality.

HAS ANYTHING CHANGED?

In contrast to the 2023 study, the 2015 investigation did not reveal significant gender discrepancies in the duration of time male and female councilors had been active members of their political parties prior to their appointment as councilors. However, the gender gap regarding the types of functions held within political parties by councilors remained somewhat similar; men were more likely than women to have served as presidents of local party units and the party's youth organization. It is worth noting, however, that in 2015 men were more likely to be members of executive boards and congress, whereas in the 2023 study, these positions were distributed more evenly between male and female councilors.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Position of Councilor

There are notable differences between interviewed male and female councilors in terms of the perceived advantages and disadvantages of their positions. Male councilors emphasize the satisfaction they feel when helping citizens and the status and income that come with the job. They also note the challenge of balancing the job with other interests, such as hobbies.

‘The advantage of the position is that the councilor can solve the problems of the residents, where only goodwill is needed and the opportunity to be involved in the processes. Information is easily available, and we can act upon reactions from citizens. Also, the amount of income and the certain status in the society can be considered as an advantage that comes with the position.’ – Male representative

For female councilors, the advantages of their position include helping more people with a greater variety of issues, having a say in decision-making, and making systemic changes. They derive moral satisfaction from helping others, and everyday problems are solved more efficiently.

‘The moment you decide to be active in politics, it is the first step that will allow you to participate in the councils and will make you a good politician. It’s an opportunity to say what you think about an issue and how you think something could be done better.’ – Female representative

However, they face more significant challenges, including less time spent with family and friends, less privacy, and less time for private matters. They also have to deal with insufficient financial resources for the municipality to function, a lack of decentralization, and limited independent power to make changes. Partisanship guided by personal interest and a lack of political will can also impede progress. Additionally, female councilors note that they cannot please everyone and may make enemies.

‘Due to the weak level of decentralization, the municipalities in Macedonia have insufficient funds, making them one of the poorest municipalities not only in the region and Europe, but also beyond. This is deliberate, to ensure power stays in the central government.’
– Female representative

'There are even times when you need to be dedicated to something for 24 hours and have your phone on. So, it often happens that you cannot devote time and attention to private matters, whether it is a wedding or a vacation, and you have to cancel them.' – Female representative

'My family suffers the most because I don't have enough time for them.'
– Female representative

'You can't make everyone happy, and someone will definitely hate you.'
– Female representative

Remarkably, when considering the familial relationships of councilors, it was found that female councilors were more likely to express a sense of reduced amount of time spent with family, while their male counterparts reported such experiences with far less frequency. This is an intriguing finding, as it suggests that the demands of councilor duties may have a more significant impact on female councilors' personal lives and familial relationships compared to their male counterparts.

'When you take on certain responsibilities, like a demanding job, it can be tough to find time for yourself and loved ones. In some jobs, there's no set schedule, and you need to be available to handle things whenever they come up. This can be stressful and can make you feel like you're carrying a heavy load every day. But it's all part of the job, and you know what you're signing up for.' – Female representative

'I would single out as a disadvantage that I miss more time to spend with my child, but I try to isolate my private life from the council life and for now everything is somehow working out.' – Female representative
'My life hasn't changed at all since becoming a councilor. I have more responsibilities, but there are no significant changes in my private life' – Male representative.

Ambitions for Further Political Involvement

According to the research, female councilors exhibit higher aspirations for attaining further political engagement in positions where quotas are in place for gender representation (councilors and MPs), in contrast to male councilors. This indicates that female councilors tend to have greater aspirations where their participation is ensured. This finding aligns with the previously identified gender disparity in party support, with female councilors receiving comparatively less backing from their political parties. This factor may also have an impact on the motivation and ambition of female politicians within the political environment in which they operate (Figure 17).

The gender gap in political ambition is evident among councilors, as female councilors tend to have lower confidence in achieving their political goals compared to their male counterparts. Despite having similar ambitions, women are less likely to believe they will succeed in obtaining any of the listed political positions. This gender gap in confidence can be attributed to several factors, including the lack of support and mentorship for women in politics, societal norms that discourage women from seeking leadership positions, and systemic barriers that hinder women's progress in the political arena. As a result, women may perceive their path to success as more challenging and feel less optimistic about achieving their goals compared to men.

% Of Councilors Who Have Further Political Ambitions

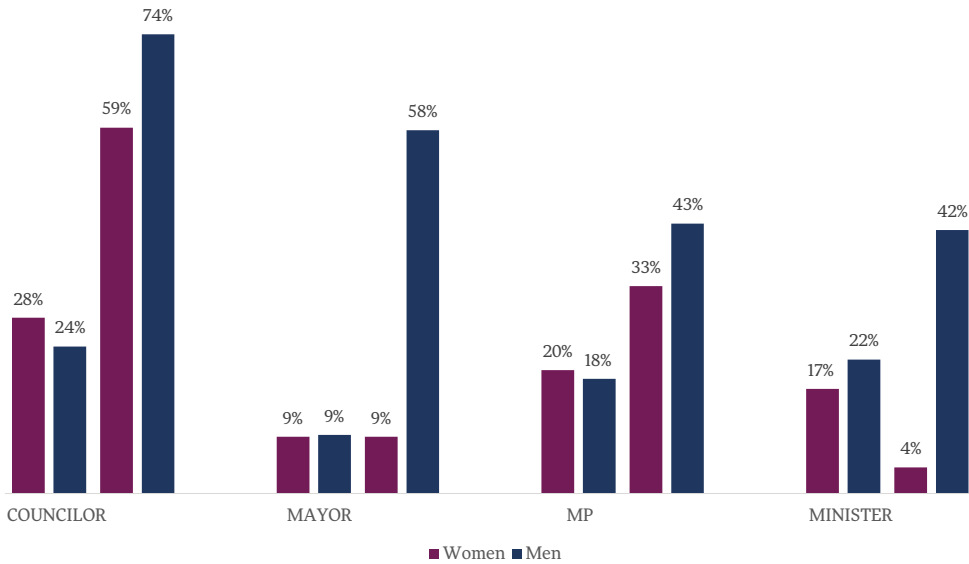


Figure 17: Overview of the percentage of councilors who have further political ambitions and their confidence of obtaining said positions, by gender.

The findings from the data reveal intriguing patterns among councilors in terms of their willingness to continue their political involvement. Notably, the youngest councilors (18-29 years old) stand out as significantly more inclined to seek re-election as councilors compared to their older counterparts. This suggests a heightened level of enthusiasm and commitment among the younger generation towards continued civic engagement and political leadership. This trend may reflect a growing sense of agency and aspiration among the youth to actively shape the political landscape and contribute to their communities.

Furthermore, the data highlights a distinct relationship between educational attainment and political ambitions among councilors. Specifically, only councilors with university or master’s degrees express a willingness to become mayors, with those holding a master’s degree demonstrating a higher propensity for aspiring to MP and ministerial positions. This suggests that higher education may play a crucial role in shaping the career aspirations of councilors, with advanced degrees potentially serving as a catalyst for seeking higher levels of political leadership.

Interestingly, the data also shed light on the influence of political party affiliation on councilors' ambitions for further political involvement. Councilors from VMRO-DPMNE exhibit a higher likelihood of expressing aspirations to become mayors, MPs, and ministers compared to councilors from other political parties. This suggests that political party affiliation may play a significant role in shaping councilors' political trajectories, with party ideology and policies potentially influencing their future ambitions and motivations.

The qualitative findings revealed that when interviewed, councilors, irrespective of gender, exhibited a propensity to remain politically active in the future. However, the level of certainty concerning this involvement varied, with women more inclined to express a conditional interest in the continuation of their political careers. Specifically, female councilors were more likely to highlight the significance of the team surrounding them and the trustworthiness of their co-runners within the party as a determinant of their further involvement in politics. In contrast, male councilors displayed a more unwavering commitment to their political careers, with no significant conditional clauses mentioned.

'I want to have a career in politics, but I won't work with just anyone. I have been in politics for a while and know many people and their politics. I'm willing to work with certain groups based on their values and methods, but not at any cost or with just any setup. If I don't like the people or the way they work, then I won't join them.' – Female representative

This gendered divide in the certainty of future political involvement further reinforces the challenges women face in navigating the complex landscape of intra-party politics. It highlights the need for women to protect themselves not only from their political opponents but also from their fellow party members, who might not always provide the support and encouragement that women require to thrive in politics.

HAS ANYTHING CHANGED?

In 2015, female councilors demonstrated greater political ambition compared to their counterparts in the 2023 study. Notably, a third of female councilors expressed their desire to seek re-election for council (37%), become members of parliament (32%), or members of the government (33%), with one in four aspiring to assume the role of mayor (23%). Intriguingly, women expressed similar levels of optimism as their male colleagues in terms of their chances of being elected as members of parliament or the government but demonstrated lower levels of confidence than men regarding their chances of being re-elected to council or being elected as mayors.

Differences in Perceived Quality of Own Qualifications and Work

Consistent with previous research, the data reveals that male councilors exhibit greater self-assurance when evaluating their performance compared to their female counterparts. Specifically, a striking 64% of male councilors consider themselves to be in the top 15% of councilors, while 52% of female councilors hold a similar belief. Comparably (although statistically insignificant), male councilors are more inclined to believe that their colleagues perceive them to be part of the top 15%, with 50% expressing such a sentiment. This is in contrast to their female colleagues who share this belief to a lesser extent, with 40% claiming to be perceived as top performers (Figure 18).

There could be several underlying factors for the differences in self-confidence and perception of work between male and female councilors. One factor could be the gender stereotypes and societal expectations that women often face, which can result in women having lower levels of confidence in their abilities and being less likely to self-promote. Additionally, women may face more barriers and discrimination in their political careers, which can further impact their self-confidence and perception of their work. This could be compounded by the lack of support and mentorship that female councilors may receive from their parties and colleagues, as previous findings have shown. Furthermore, there may be gender biases in the evaluation and recognition of councilors' work, which could influence councilors' self-confidence and perception of their work.

How would you assess your work in the Council, compared to other councilors?

In your opinion, how would other councilors assess your work in the council, compared to the other councilors? Do they think that you are...

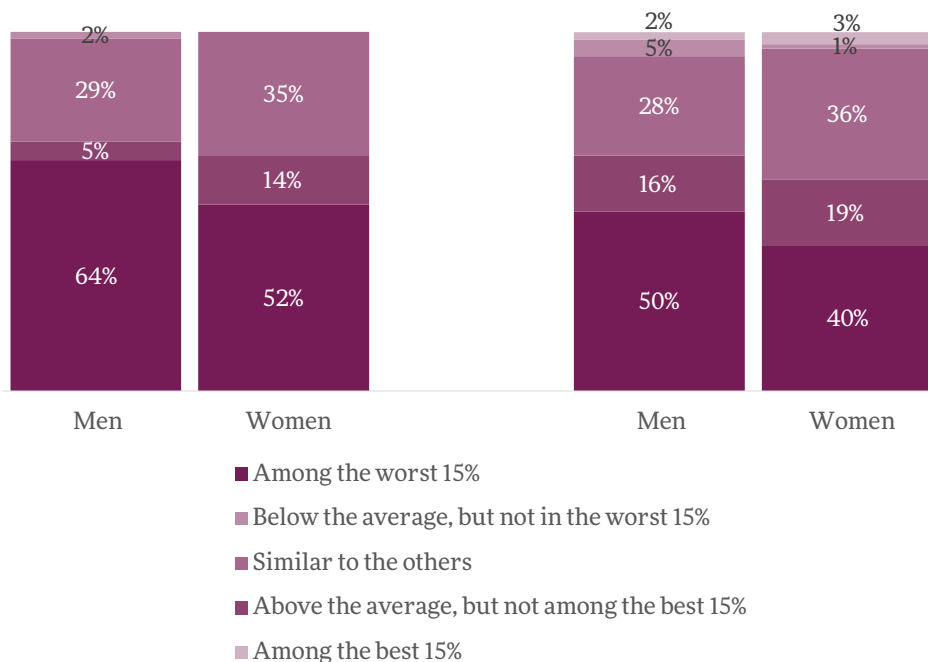


Figure 18: Assessment of own work in the council compared to other councilors, by gender.

Although the vast majority of councilors (94%) to some extent claim to fulfill the requirements of the councilor position, their self-assessments of their influence on council decisions seem to be impacted by a variety of factors, including gender, age and political affiliation. While the majority of councilors feel that they have influence on the decisions made by council, there are significant differences in confidence levels based on these factors (Figure 19).

The data shows that a majority of councilors (68%) perceive themselves as having an impact on the decision-making process, while 13% remain neutral and 18% feel powerless. However, a gender breakdown reveals that female councilors (74%) feel more influential than their male peers (62%). This could be attributed to various factors, but no conclusions can be made without further research into the reasons behind this.

RESULTS

Examining the age demographics, it appears that councilors belonging to the 18-29 age bracket express the highest level of influence (77%) compared to their older counterparts. Although statistically insignificant, this could potentially be indicative of their heightened familiarity with contemporary social trends and issues within their communities, coupled with their willingness to take decisive action towards addressing them.

An interesting finding is that councilors from the VMRO-DPMNE political affiliation perceive themselves as the most influential, with 82% of them feeling that they have a say in the decisions made by the council. This observation could be attributed to the party being in power in most municipalities or the councilors' enhanced sense of belonging and solidarity with their fellow party members.

According to the data provided, a vast majority of councilors affiliated with the ruling majority in the municipal council feel that they have influence on the decisions made by the council, with 84% expressing this sentiment. In contrast, only 6.4% of councilors from the ruling party feel that they do not have influence on the decisions made by the council. On the other hand, a significant proportion of councilors affiliated with a party that represents the minority in the municipal council feel that they do not have influence on the decisions made by the council, with 37% expressing this sentiment. This could be due to the nature of being in a minority position in the council and therefore having less control over decision-making processes. Overall, these results suggest that political affiliations and more importantly, political majority can understandably and predictably play a significant role in determining a councilor's perceived influence on the decisions made by the council.

Self-assessment of Councilors' Influence on Decisions Made by Municipal Council

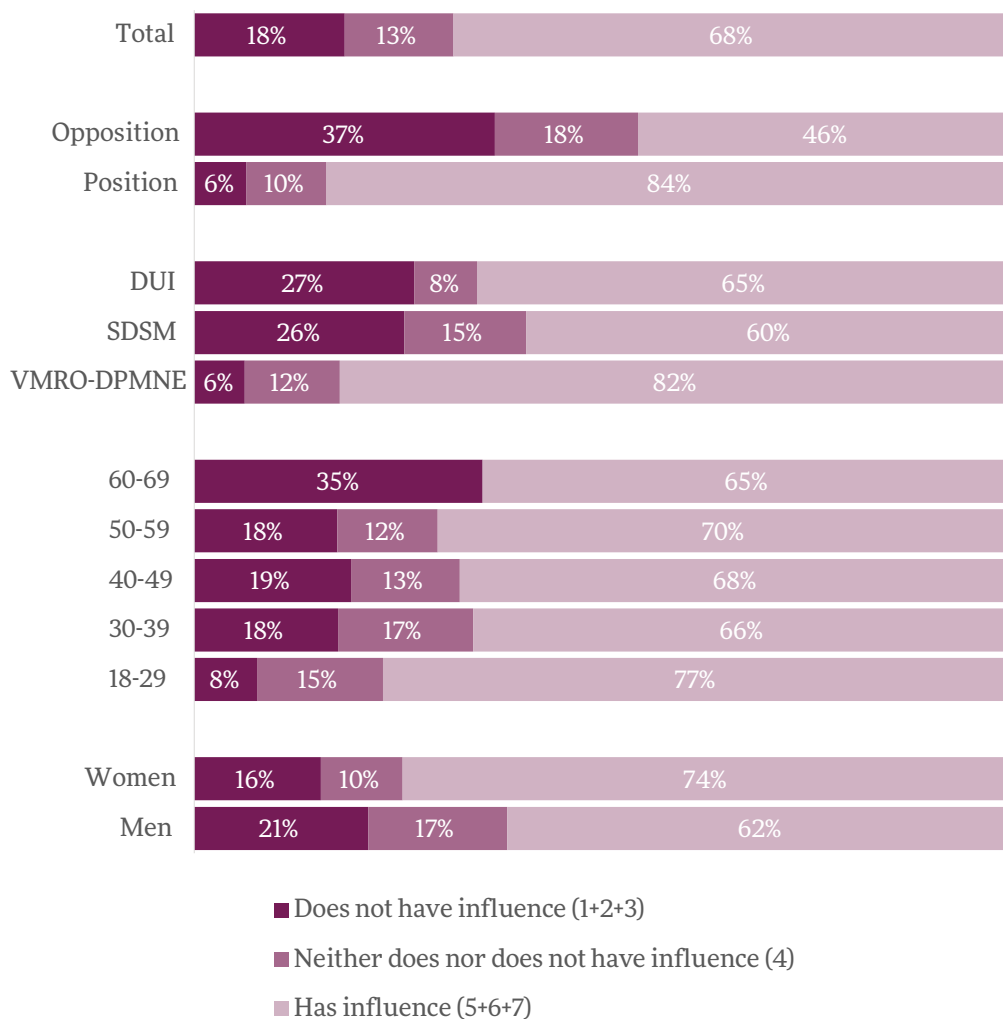


Figure 19: Assessment of own influence on decisions made by municipal council, in total, by gender, by age, by political party and by position of ruling within the council.

HAS ANYTHING CHANGED?

Consistent with the 2023 findings, the 2015 study indicated that both male and female councilors held a high opinion of their abilities, with men displaying notably greater conviction in their work being exceptional (in the top 15%) when compared to women. Remarkably, women demonstrated slightly greater self-assurance than men when discussing their ability to fulfill the requirements of the councilor position. However, there were no discernible gender disparities in the perceived influence wielded by municipal councilors on decision-making processes.

When asked about projects of which they are most proud, gender differences in project preferences among councilors are noticeable, with male councilors often prioritizing infrastructural improvements while female councilors place more emphasis on projects related to care provision and traditional roles of women in society such as childcare, education, and support for vulnerable groups. Moreover, female councilors' prioritization of gender equality as a local commitment suggests their recognition of the persistent gender disparities and the importance of addressing them through policy and practice. This can be explained by the gendered socialization and expectations that shape individuals' preferences and interests, as well as the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities between genders (Figure 20).

Which are your commitments for a project, initiative, policy or program that you are most proud of as a councilor?

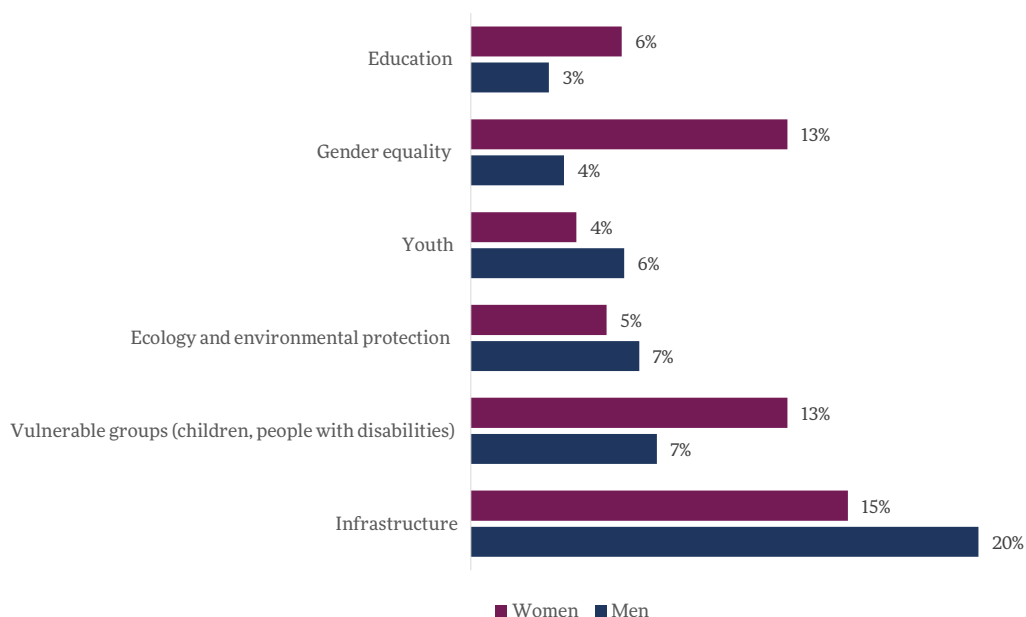


Figure 20: Biggest personal success as a councilor, by gender.

The largest share of councilors, regardless of gender, are not able to point out an activity that they would do differently if given the chance (38%). Others state they wish they were more engaged in the implementation of projects (11%) or advocated for greater transparency (9%). Although there are visible differences among male and female councilors when talking about the biggest success in their work, the absence of any perceptible gender gap in the types of perceived missed opportunities within the councilor profession suggests that this issue may not be influenced by gender-based factors.

Gender Equality in the Political Arena

When and How Will Gender Equality Be Achieved?

According to the councilors interviewed, there is a clear gender divide in how gender equality is perceived in North Macedonia, both in general and in politics. Female councilors feel that the current discourse on gender equality is just lip service and lacks concrete actions to improve the position of women in society. They note that while political parties publicly support female candidates and equal participation of women in politics, decision makers in party bodies are mostly men who decide whether to support female members or not. Women are often supported only because of the quota system, and rarely encouraged to run for mayoral positions.

‘The opportunities for men and women in Macedonia are not equal. Although it was better in the past, it is now getting worse, and women are losing their equal opportunities. The policy of equality that existed during the time of the former Yugoslavia has not been sufficiently preserved over the years.’ – Female representative

‘We now have to fight again to obtain the privileges our grandmothers fought for for us, so that we can pass them down to our daughters.’ – Female representative

Looking at the data from the online survey, it appears that the majority of councilors (71%) in North Macedonia believe that they have a personal responsibility to improve gender equality in the country. Specifically, 75% of female councilors and 68% of male councilors believe that they have a personal responsibility to promote gender equality (Figure 21).

However, it is worth noting that a significant proportion of both women and men councilors feel that they do not have a personal responsibility for improving gender equality. More than one in ten female councilors (12%) and 15% of male councilors reported that they do not have a personal responsibility, while 13% of women and 17% of men reported that they are unsure whether or not they have a personal responsibility.

While there are some differences in the responses of councilors with varying educational backgrounds, these differences are not statistically significant. Nonetheless, the findings provide intriguing insights into the role of education in shaping councilors’ perceptions of

their personal responsibility in advancing gender equality. More specifically, councilors who have completed high school only are less likely to claim personal responsibility for promoting gender equality compared to their more highly educated counterparts. Conversely, councilors with college or higher education are more likely to believe that they have a personal responsibility in advancing gender equality. This suggests that higher levels of education may increase awareness and understanding of gender equality issues and foster a sense of individual agency and responsibility to promote gender equality.

Looking at the data by age group, although statistically insignificant, the 60-69 age range stands out as having the highest percentage of councilors who feel a sense of personal responsibility towards enhancing gender equality. A remarkable 82.4% of respondents in this age range indicated that they feel a personal responsibility towards promoting gender equality. On the other hand, the 40-49 and 50-59 age range has the lowest percentage of councilors who feel a sense of personal responsibility towards promoting gender equality, with only 68% of each indicating a sense of responsibility. This could be a concerning finding, as this group of councilors represents a significant proportion of those in leadership positions who can make decisions that impact gender equality.

The data reveals that, aside from a noteworthy finding according to which a significant proportion of councilors affiliated with DUI (23%) reported feeling uncertain about their personal responsibility in this domain, as they claimed neither to have nor not to have a sense of responsibility, there are no other discernible differences among councilors belonging to different political parties with regard to their perceptions of personal responsibility in promoting gender equality.

It is important to consider why some councilors may not feel that they have a personal responsibility for promoting gender equality. It is possible that some may not fully understand the importance and impact of gender equality or may not have a clear understanding of how they can contribute to promoting it. Alternatively, some councilors may not prioritize gender equality as a key issue or may hold beliefs or biases that hinder their ability to promote it effectively.

The data also reveals that male councilors display a slightly higher level of optimism compared to their female counterparts, pertaining to the duration of time required to attain gender equality, with more than half of them (55%) claiming it will be achieved in the following ten years, compared to 51% of women. Additionally, an alarming 10% of male councilors harbor the view that gender parity has already been accomplished. This

suggests a lack of awareness about the persistent challenges faced by women in North Macedonia. However, the fact that the majority of councilors believe that they have a personal responsibility to promote gender equality is a positive starting point for ongoing efforts to achieve gender equality in the country (Figure 22).

Do you think that you have personal responsibility for enhancing gender equality in North Macedonia?

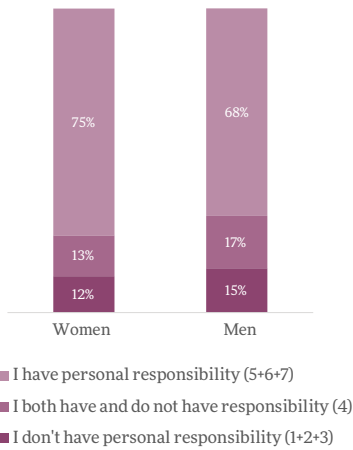


Figure 21: Extent to which councilors perceive themselves as personally responsible for enhancing gender equality in N. Macedonia, by gender.

When will gender equality be achieved?

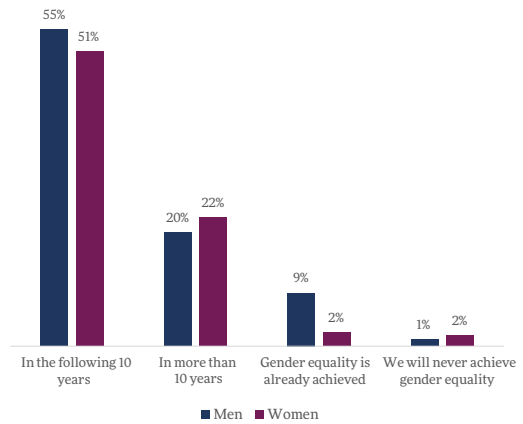


Figure 22: Councilors' perception of the future of gender equality, by gender.

HAS ANYTHING CHANGED?

In contrast to the 2023 findings, the 2015 study revealed moderate differences in the perceived responsibility of men and women in promoting gender equality, with women bearing a greater sense of obligation. Conversely, unlike the 2023 results, there were no discernible discrepancies in the degree of optimism among councilors concerning the length of time required to realize gender parity in politics.

Impact of the Law on Equal Opportunities

The data suggests that the majority of councilors perceive the law on equal opportunities as an effective instrument in promoting gender equality, with 65% of all respondents indicating that it contributes to advancing this important goal. Furthermore, the responses of female and male councilors shed light on their perceptions of the law’s impact on gender equality (Figure 23).

The data indicates that out of the councilors who are acquainted with the law, 74% of female councilors believe that the Law on equal opportunities contributes to enhancing gender equality, while only 63% of male councilors share this view. Although statistically insignificant, this suggests that female councilors are more likely to perceive the law’s impact as positive. However, it is noteworthy that a significant percentage of male councilors (23%) are uncertain about the law’s effectiveness, while only 13% of female councilors are similarly uncertain.

Does the Law on equal opportunities contribute to enhancing gender equality?

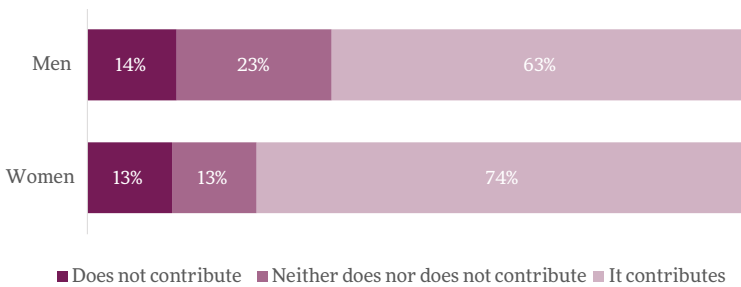


Figure 23: Perception of the Law on equal opportunities’ impact in enhancing gender equality, by gender.

During the course of the interviews, it was discovered that the councilors possessed a limited familiarity with the Law on Equal Opportunities. Despite this, the majority of them held the view that the legislation serves as a valuable means of advancing gender equality, but also that the law alone is insufficient for achieving gender parity. This sentiment suggests that despite the existence of legal provisions that support equal opportunities for women, the actual implementation of these policies is often burdened with difficulties and shortcomings.

‘I’ll be honest, I don’t have a strong grasp of the Law on Equal Opportunities. But from what I understand, having laws in place

to promote gender equality is one thing, but making sure they are implemented effectively is another. It's not enough to just have laws, we need to actively work towards making sure women have equal opportunities and support to succeed.' – Female representative

HAS ANYTHING CHANGED?

Consistent with the 2023 observations, the 2015 study indicated that the majority of councilors believed that the Law on equal opportunities had fostered gender equality since its enactment. Nevertheless, in contrast to the current situation, there were no marked gender disparities in councilors' assessments of the law's effectiveness in 2015.

Involvement of Women in Politics

The data indicates that a significant proportion of male councilors - approximately one-third (32%) - to some extent hold the view that women should not be involved in politics, which is very concerning. While this sentiment is less prevalent among female councilors, a noteworthy proportion - around 10% - also holds a similar attitude. Possible explanations for this gender disparity could include ingrained gender stereotypes and cultural attitudes that view politics as a masculine domain, as well as a lack of female role models in politics (Figure 24).

The findings regarding the belief among councilors that women should not be involved in politics reveal some interesting patterns when analyzed by age group. Among councilors aged 18-19, 18% believe to some extent that women should not be involved in politics. This percentage rises to 24% for those aged 30-39, and 20% for those aged 40-49. However, the percentage drops significantly to 10% for councilors aged 50-59, before rising again to 36% among those aged 60-69.

One potential explanation for this trend could be related to generational attitudes towards gender roles and women's participation in public life. It is possible that older councilors, who may have grown up during a time when traditional gender roles were more prevalent, are less likely to view women as having a role in politics. Conversely, younger councilors may have been socialized in a time when gender equality and women's empowerment have

been more emphasized, leading to lower rates of opposition to women's involvement in politics. Nonetheless, it is notable that even among the youngest age group, some councilors still hold views that women should not be involved in politics. Another factor that could be contributing to these beliefs is the perceived threat to male power and privilege that can be associated with increasing female representation in politics. Some individuals may feel that their own opportunities or status could be undermined by a more gender-balanced political landscape.

Furthermore, when discussing the reasons behind underrepresentation of women in mayoral positions, male and female councilors display significantly differing attitudes. Male councilors often attribute the lack of female representation to a supposed lack of ambition (16%) or interest (15%) on the part of women, whereas female councilors are more likely to point to systemic barriers such as traditional societal attitudes (29%) and a lack of support from political parties (17%), especially in the absence of quotas (Figure 25).

The finding that male and female councilors attribute the underrepresentation of women in mayoral positions to different factors can be explained by a number of reasons. One factor is gender bias, which may lead male councilors to assume that women lack ambition or interest in politics. Female councilors, on the other hand, may have more direct experience with systemic barriers such as societal attitudes and a lack of support from political parties, which they are more likely to point to as explanations for the lack of female representation. Additionally, men and women may have different perspectives on what constitutes a barrier to women's political representation, and they may use language that reflects gender stereotypes and biases. Addressing these factors is critical to achieving greater gender equality in political representation.

In your opinion, to what extent should women be involved in politics?

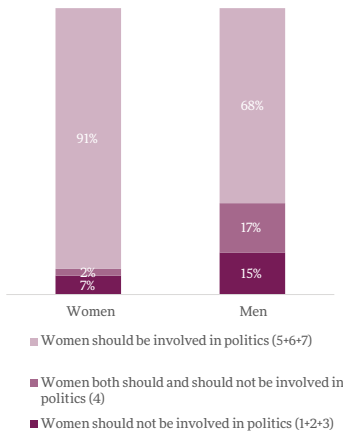


Figure 24: Attitudes on female involvement in politics, by gender

What is the reason for the low number of female mayors?

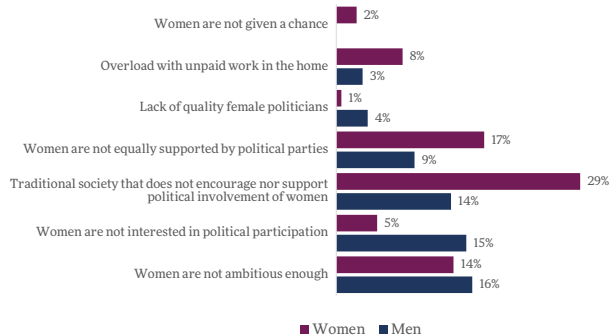


Figure 25: Perceived reasons for low number of female mayors, by gender

HAS ANYTHING CHANGED?

In contrast to the 2023 results, a lower proportion of male councilors in 2015 harbored the notion that women’s involvement in politics should be limited to some extent (19%). Nonetheless, the tendency to attribute women’s underrepresentation in politics to their purported lack of interest and/or ambition persisted across both years, with most male councilors endorsing this view, while their female counterparts pointed to male-dominated political parties as the main obstacle to women’s ascent to political power, reflecting a reluctance to relinquish their authority and place trust in female leadership.

The findings were similar among interviewed councilors as well. The councilors who were interviewed expressed varying perceptions of gender equality in both the country and politics. In particular, female councilors frequently conveyed the notion that the current narrative on gender equality in society and politics was not backed by concrete actions to improve the status of women.

Interestingly, despite public declarations of support for gender equality in politics, female councilors who were interviewed reported that the vast majority of decision-makers in political parties are men. This power dynamic may contribute to the persistence of gender inequality in politics, as male decision-makers may not prioritize the support and advancement of women within their parties. The quota system is cited as a mechanism that ensures female candidates receive support from their parties to run, although this may also be perceived as a form of tokenism rather than genuine support for women's participation in politics.

'Women may avoid running for political positions because they receive discouragement from their environment and family, and because they may lack self-confidence and doubt their abilities to handle the responsibilities.' – Male representative

'I believe in gender equality, which means men and women should be treated equally at work without any shortcuts or special treatment. At first, I did not support quotas for women because it seemed like a shortcut, but after witnessing how political parties function, I realized that without quotas, there may be no women candidates. I think we talk a lot about gender equality but don't do enough about it. Many women are not ready to take opportunities in politics and do not want the added pressure, thinking they will not be attacked. For things to change, women in politics need to assert their equality and not give in to pressure, such as saying they have to rush home to take care of their children. Men would never say that. It takes courage to do this, as it may be seen as a threat by men or not supported by the public.' – Female representative

'There is a lack of equal opportunities between men and women, and as women, we have to work twice as hard to be seen as equal. For instance, we refrain from socializing in pubs and making deals there, instead opting for more professional settings. We also avoid drinking during business conversations, as it can blur the lines of professionalism and responsibility. When dealing with citizens' funds, we take extra care and ensure that our decisions are wise and carefully thought out. All of this means that we have to work much harder than our male counterparts to be equally valued and respected in our work.' – Female representative

Male councilors' perspectives are often tied to their political beliefs, with conservatives more likely to believe that women have the same opportunities as men and that women themselves are not taking the necessary steps to succeed in politics. Those from democratic and independent parties, however, are more likely to claim that women do not have the same opportunities as men. Councilors of Albanian ethnicity note that Albanian women may not be interested in politics due to cultural norms that favor men in leadership positions.

'The role of a mayor demands extensive dedication and requires being away from home for extended periods of time. Unfortunately, in our society, women are still expected to take care of most family responsibilities.' – Male representative

In addition, female councilors noted that the media and the general public have a tendency to hold women in politics to higher standards than their male counterparts. They argued that female politicians are often expected to display qualities such as emotional intelligence, compassion, and nurturing, while men are given more leeway to be tough, assertive, and even abrasive in their leadership styles. Furthermore, female politicians are more likely to face scrutiny and criticism regarding their appearance, tone of voice, and demeanor, whereas these aspects are often not even noticed when it comes to male politicians. As a result, women in politics feel like they have to work harder and be better than their male colleagues in order to be taken seriously and achieve the same level of success.

'Citizens more easily forgive huge mistakes made by mediocre male politicians than miniscule mistakes made by excellent female politicians.' – Female representative

'During a discussion on a certain topic in the central presidency, I shared my thoughts. A male colleague spoke after me and said almost the same thing, but everyone else who spoke afterwards agreed with him without acknowledging my contribution. I felt that my input was not taken seriously because I am a woman. I believe that when women speak, others are just waiting for their turn to speak, while men are listened to more attentively and considered more correct. This behavior frustrates me.' – Female representative

There is a perceived lack of female solidarity in local politics, as reported by the interviewed councilors. Female councilors often feel unsupported by other women in politics, and

some even report feeling undermined by their female colleagues. This lack of solidarity can be attributed to a variety of factors, such as competition for limited resources and power, and the societal conditioning that pits women against each other. Additionally, female councilors often face more scrutiny and criticism than their male counterparts, leading to a sense of isolation and mistrust. The absence of a supportive network of female colleagues can hinder the progress of female councilors and limit their ability to effect change. However, some councilors note that there are efforts being made to increase solidarity among women in politics, such as mentorship programs and networking events.

'Women can be critical of other women, which adds another layer of complexity.' – Female representative

'I am frustrated with the conflicts among women in the council. It's disheartening to see that instead of supporting each other, some women engage in criticism and competitiveness.' – Female representative

Big, Bad Feminism

Despite displaying feminist attitudes and values, it is noteworthy that many of the interviewed councilors distance themselves from the term “feminist” when asked directly. In fact, the question seems to elicit discomfort and hesitation, with some councilors even explicitly denying any affiliation with feminism. This reaction suggests that the term “feminist” is viewed negatively by some, and that there may be a lack of understanding of its true meaning.

'I believe that there are different types of feminism. When it is mild and controlled, feminism can be positive. However, when feminism is practiced in a bitter and unscrupulous way, where the representation of women's interests becomes extreme, I do not accept that kind of approach.' – Female representative

'I don't know what feminism is and I do not consider myself to be a feminist. I only believe in the personal responsibility of advocating for women rights. I encourage and support women to do whatever they want to do for themselves' - Male representative.

‘To me, feminism wants to make women superior to men. Women should be respected, and their unique qualities and perspectives should be valued. They have a vital role to play in creating a better future for all of us. However, this does not mean that women should be placed in a superior position over men, that’s what feminism is about.’

– Male representative

The reluctance to identify as a feminist may stem from a variety of factors, including the perception of feminism as a divisive and aggressive ideology that pits men against women. This view is often propagated by media outlets and individuals with anti-feminist agendas, who paint feminists as militant activists seeking to reverse traditional gender roles and claim the superiority of women. As a result, some people may shy away from the term “feminist” to avoid being associated with this misrepresentation of feminism.

Another possible explanation is the belief that feminism is exclusively concerned with women’s issues, and therefore excludes men. This perspective fails to recognize the interconnectedness of gender issues and how they impact both men and women. It may also reflect a lack of understanding of the many ways in which feminist principles benefit men as well, such as by challenging rigid gender roles and promoting gender equality in all spheres of life.

Violence in Politics

Experience with Different Types of Violence and Types of Support Received

Research has consistently shown that female councilors are more likely to be subjected to gender-based harassment than their male colleagues. This type of harassment can take various forms, including unwanted questions about their personal lives, obtrusive comments about their physical appearance, persistent and inappropriate staring, sexually suggestive jokes or remarks, and inappropriate invitations for a date (Figure 26).

This difference in experience could be due to gender stereotypes and biases that are deeply ingrained in our culture. Women are often seen as caregivers and nurturers, and some people may view them as being less qualified or capable than men in leadership roles, including in politics. This bias can lead to women being subjected to more scrutiny and criticism, including harassment, as they seek to assert their authority.

Analyzing the data on the gender of perpetrators who committed different types of violence to councilors, it becomes clear that the gender of the perpetrator varies depending on the gender of the councilor. For male councilors, 56% of the incidents involved both men and women as perpetrators, while 14% of the incidents were committed by men only, and 30% were allegedly committed by women only. On the other hand, for female councilors, the majority of incidents (55%) were committed by men, while 41% of incidents involved both men and women, and only 3% of incidents were committed by women only (Figure 27).

The data indicates that while men are more likely to be perpetrators of violence against female councilors, women are also involved in a significant number of incidents. On the other hand, male councilors face a more balanced distribution of perpetrators, with both men and women being involved in more than half of the incidents. It is important to note that the data does not provide information on the type or severity of the violence committed, and further research is needed to fully understand the dynamics of violence against councilors.

Experience with Different Types of Violence

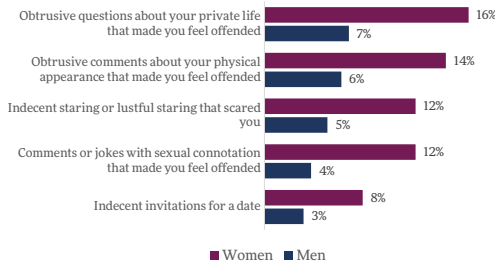


Figure 26: Councilors’ experience with violence, by gender.

Gender of Perpetrators

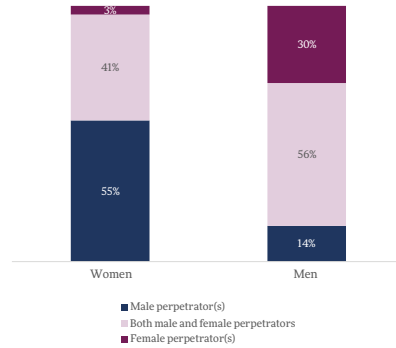


Figure 27: Gender of perpetrators, by gender of councilors.

The in-depth conversations with female councilors reveal a concerning tendency to downplay objectively dangerous situations they encountered both during political campaigns and after assuming office. In contrast to their male counterparts, who tend to report conflicts primarily with members of the opposing party, women engaged in local politics often encounter unpleasant and even dangerous situations with members of both their own party and opposing parties. This suggests that women may face additional challenges within their own parties, where they may lack support and protection in confronting potential threats to their safety and wellbeing. The perception among female councilors that they bear a personal responsibility for defending themselves, without any expectation of assistance or protection from party leadership or other entities, is a troubling indication of the gendered power dynamics that continue to pervade political spaces. This may be especially true in situations where there are power imbalances within the party structure, and women may feel that they do not have the same level of influence or authority as their male counterparts. This can create a culture where women feel that they are expected to be tough and self-sufficient, without any expectation of assistance or protection from the party or other entities.

‘I didn’t feel unsafe, even in tense situations. I have learned how to stay calm and defuse potential conflicts. When things get tense, you have to make a judgment call about how to respond. I have never felt like my safety was at risk, although there have been times when I’ve felt like I needed to back down or compromise.’ – Female representative

'In situations like this, I tend to be very mild-mannered and keep my cool. I don't like to create a scene or draw attention to myself. In this case, it was just one or two individuals who were causing trouble, not a whole group. I felt like I could handle the situation myself, without needing to involve anyone else.' – Female representative

Female councilors in some areas have reported receiving threats on social media, but many feel that the police are unable to adequately address the issue. Despite filing reports and requesting assistance from law enforcement, they feel that not enough is being done to protect them. Some have even reported feeling that the police are dismissive of their concerns and do not take the threats seriously. This perceived lack of support from authorities can leave female councilors feeling vulnerable and marginalized, with few options for recourse.

'I felt unsafe when I was followed and received threats of kidnapping and murder, which I reported to the Ministry of the Interior. Unfortunately, the case was not resolved, and the social media account that sent the threatening messages was simply blocked.' – Female representative

'In our country, the level of protection for public figures is very low, and as a woman, I felt particularly vulnerable when I received threats on social media that made me fear for my safety and well-being. Although I didn't feel safe, I believed that reporting the threats would be futile due to the lack of adequate protection and support.' – Female representative

Furthermore, there may be a sense of stigma associated with reporting such incidents, particularly if they involve members of the same party. Female councilors may feel that reporting such incidents could reflect poorly on the party and harm their political career prospects. Additionally, women may feel that reporting such incidents could be seen as a sign of weakness or vulnerability, which could further hinder their prospects in the highly competitive political environment.

'During my first week as a councilor, I received threats about my job. The people who were making the threats said that I would be fired, and they even mentioned my father's job as well. I was very worried and

upset by these threats, but I didn't know who to report them to or if reporting them would make any difference. After a while, the threats stopped on their own.' – Female representative

'I have been receiving constant threats, but when I try to take action, I'm told that nothing can be done until something actually happens. It feels like there is no support for me, and that if the threats were directed at a man, they would have been taken more seriously. I haven't seen any public condemnation or action from the authorities. It's frustrating and disheartening, and it makes me wonder how other women can be encouraged to come forward if there are no repercussions for those who threaten us.' – Female representative

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Findings

Demographics

- A significant proportion of councilors are below the age of 50, with 75% falling into this category. Women are more likely than men to become councilors after reaching the age of 50.
- Women who serve in councils are significantly more highly educated than their male colleagues, with 89% of female councilors holding a university degree or higher compared to 72% of male councilors.
- There is no significant difference in the marital status of male and female councilors, with 76% of councilors being married. However, there are less women with pre-school children engaged in local politics than men with children of the same age, which points to further obstacles for female politicians.
- Both male and female councilors are equally likely to have employed partners, but the employment status of male councilors' spouses may be influenced by party membership.
- Female councilors have a closer relationship to political incumbents compared to their male counterparts, and the advantage of having familial ties to established political figures is more significant for female councilors than for male councilors.
- Despite most councilors being employed, there are significant gender disparities in the distribution of employment across the state administration and privately owned enterprises, with women councilors predominantly employed in the state administration.

The Beginnings

- Councilors' decision to become a candidate was primarily a joint decision with the political party that endorsed them, with no significant differences based on gender, age, educational background, or political party. A worrying 33% of councilors reported lacking prior knowledge of their candidacy nomination.

- The most significant motivator for candidacy for councilors is trust in their ability to contribute to improving the living conditions in their municipality, with both men and women sharing this sentiment. The desire to change the current state of the municipality was the second most common motivator, with men slightly more likely than women to express this motivation.
- Men were slightly more likely to report a neutral reaction to their nomination, while women were more likely to express a strong sense of responsibility associated with the role.
- Women were more likely to receive caution from their immediate family about the potential consequences of engaging in political activity and express concerns about a reduction in time devoted to family matters. Female councilors were more likely to report a more equal division of unpaid household labor following their appointment, whereas no men mentioned any changes to their domestic responsibilities.
- A higher percentage of men than women received complete support from their political parties when running for office. Meanwhile, a higher proportion of women than men experienced mixed reactions. Gender differences exist in the level and type of support received from political parties when running for office.

Political Career

- Women are generally required to have a longer tenure than men to secure a council position within the first decade of their party membership. Women often require a minimum of 10 to 15 years of active participation before being considered, while men have an easier path towards securing a council position within the first decade of their party membership.
- Male councilors are more frequently found in presidential positions within their parties, whereas their female counterparts tend to occupy various other membership roles within party bodies. Men are more likely to hold positions of power, such as the President of the local organizational unit, with 67% of those in this role being men. Women are less likely to be members of such party bodies, with only one-third (33%) of those in this role being female.
- Female councilors exhibit higher aspirations for attaining further political engagement in positions where quotas are in place for gender representation (councilors and MPs), in contrast to male councilors. This indicates that female councilors tend to have greater aspirations where their participation is ensured.
- Male councilors exhibit greater self-assurance when evaluating their

performance compared to their female counterparts. Specifically, 64% of male councilors consider themselves to be in the top 15% of councilors, while only 52% of female councilors hold a similar belief.

- Female councilors feel more influential than their male peers, with 74% feeling that they have an impact on decision-making, compared to 62% of male councilors.
- Councilors with higher educational qualifications are more likely to feel that they have influence on the decisions made by the council. Councilors with a master's degree feel the most influential, with 73% feeling that they have influence, while councilors with a college degree or vocational secondary school education feel less influential.
- Male councilors often prioritize infrastructural improvements while female councilors place more emphasis on projects related to care provision and traditional roles of women in society such as childcare, education, and support for vulnerable groups.
- Female councilors prioritize gender equality as a local commitment more often than male councilors.

Attitudes on Gender Equality

- The majority of councilors (71%) in North Macedonia feel a personal responsibility to advance gender equality, but a significant proportion (12% of women and 15% of men) do not feel this responsibility.
- Councilors with higher levels of education and councilors from senior age groups are more likely to believe that they have a personal responsibility in advancing gender equality.
- Male councilors display a relatively higher level of optimism compared to their female counterparts regarding how long it is going to take the country to achieve gender equality.
- The majority of councilors perceive the Law on Equal Opportunities as an effective instrument in promoting gender equality.
- The sentiment that the law alone is insufficient in achieving gender parity suggests that despite the existence of legal provisions that support equal opportunities for women, the actual implementation of these policies is often burdened with difficulties and shortcomings.

- Around one-third of male councilors believe that women should not be involved in politics, while 10% of female councilors hold the same view, indicating gender stereotypes and lack of female role models in politics may contribute to this disparity.
- Male councilors often attribute the lack of female representation in mayoral positions to a supposed lack of ambition or interest on the part of women, while female councilors point to systemic barriers such as traditional societal attitudes and a lack of support from political parties.
- Despite public declarations of support for gender equality in politics, female councilors report that the vast majority of decision-makers in political parties are men, which may contribute to the persistence of gender inequality in politics.
- The media and the general public hold women in politics to higher standards than their male counterparts and women in politics feel like they have to work harder and be better than their male colleagues to achieve the same level of success.
- Many interviewed councilors distance themselves from the term “feminist,” potentially due to negative misperceptions of the term as a divisive and aggressive ideology that pits men against women.

Violence in Politics

- Female councilors are more likely to experience gender-based harassment than their male counterparts.
- The gender of perpetrators who commit violence against councilors varies depending on the gender of the councilor, with men being more likely to be perpetrators of violence against female councilors.
- In-depth conversations with female councilors reveal a concerning tendency to downplay dangerous situations they encounter, and women may face additional challenges within their own parties, where they may lack support and protection in confronting potential threats to their safety and wellbeing.
- Women may feel a sense of stigma associated with reporting such incidents, believing this could harm their political career prospects and be seen as a sign of weakness or vulnerability.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this report, we can conclude that women's participation in politics can and should be further developed through policy, but also through key stakeholder engagement. Thus, we are recommending the following actions that should be undertaken by the noted stakeholders:

Policy and Legislation

- Further strengthening the gender equality legislative framework and investment in capacities of governmental agencies in the implementation of key policies related to gender equality.
- Changes to the current gender quotas by enhancing the framework and inclusion of quotas for positions in executive branches of government and mandating a fifty-fifty approach for representative positions (50% for men and 50% for women). These changes may also affect the Law on political parties, bearing in mind that political parties themselves are financed by the state budget, thus also creating a better framework for women's participation in the political parties.
- Broadening the powers of the gender equality commission on both the local and national level, by providing additional funding and strengthening the public bodies working on gender equality.
- Centralized collection of gender segregated data when it comes to women's participation in the political processes of the country, including voter turnout in elections.
- Creation of a gender-based violence task force which monitors and prosecutes perpetrators of gender-based violence before, during and after political campaigns.

Political Parties

- Creation of internal policies and commissions for sanctioning gender-based violence, discrimination, and public attacks against women. Political parties should have internal procedures in place for exclusion of perpetrators of such actions and make the membership of party members contingent on adhering to the values and standards of the political parties.
- Higher inclusion of women in key executive and representative structures of the political parties, and inclusion of internal quotas for key positions in the political party.

- Investment in gender sensitive training for members of political parties, as well as cooperation with CSOs working on gender equality in the country.
- Giving more financial support, financial freedom, and program support to activities from women in the political parties.
- Creating an enabling environment for women with children, providing childcare for women during the work of the commissions and executive bodies of their party..
- Redesigning the process for becoming a member of the political party and revision of the current policies in place which limit women's participation in key areas.

Personal Level

- Women politicians should intensify their efforts to recruit other women and create a safe & supportive working environment for women's participation in politics. Women in leadership positions in parties should consciously work on further recruitment of more women and attempt to influence their male counterparts to do the same.
- Inclusion of men in the agenda for gender equality and conscious work in the direction of supporting those who have already recognized the gender gap and believe in the cause.
- Identifying and mobilizing change agents among all parties for issues related to gender equality or issues that can contribute to parity, as well as building solidarity with them, will be crucial and can be an impetus for change.

CSOs

- Continue to push for policy and legislation change, based on evidence, to achieve gender equality in all parts of society.
- Women's organizations remain a hub for future female leaders and should continue to prioritize women's empowerment and achieving parity in decision-making.
- Regular monitoring of the implementation of policies and legal obligations relating to gender equality and continued pressure to close the gaps.
- Create and support services, policies and legislation which enables women to fully participate in public and political endeavors.
- Campaigns to promote women leaders and encourage young women to enter politics, by creating a safe space in public.

- Set up structures to support young women and men which support gender equality actions.
- Invest in positive educational and public awareness campaigns to combat dangerous and harmful anti-feminist messaging that has permeated every section of society and is clearly widespread even among politicians.

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