

# GENDER EQUALITY

in decision making positions  
at the local level





# Contents

Methodology .....	4
International legal framework .....	6
Definition of decision making position and Kosovo legal framework.....	9
Quantitative findings .....	14
Mayors.....	14
Deputy Mayors.....	14
Deputy Mayors in charge of communities.....	15
Chairpersons of Municipal Assemblies .....	16
Members of municipal assemblies .....	16
Directors of municipal bodies (departments) .....	18
Decision-makers of educational institutions .....	20
Decision-makers of social institutions.....	23
Decision-makers of health institutions .....	23
Qualitative findings.....	25
Perceptions of women in decision making positions .....	25
Conclusions and recommendations.....	30

# Introduction

Since its founding in 2008, Aktiv, as a local organization, has strived to strengthen the potential of north of Kosovo in economic, social, democratic and cultural aspects. At the outset, our local organization faced challenges resulting from the specificities of the northern part of Kosovo, to which political instability, security uncertainty and a specific socio-economic climate continue to this day. In such unusual circumstances, Aktiv has directed its knowledge and expertise towards contributing to the overall development of this part of Kosovo. Through honest perseverance and true commitment, in just over a decade we transformed the complexity and challenges of the environment in which we functioned into stimuli and motivation, with the aim of overcoming all obstacles that stand in the way of the development of the northern part of Kosovo and beyond.

Taking into account the mentioned specific socio-economic climate not only in the north, but throughout Kosovo, from the very beginning Aktiv has set as one of its priorities the work in the field of women's rights and gender equality, as burning issues in this part of the Balkans. Starting its work in this field through activities uncharacteristic for this part of Kosovo, the fight for rights of women and for removal of all forms of discrimination against this sex was set into the wider context of reconciliation in Kosovo, which was unthinkable until then. By conducting research, organizing training, advocating the policies of non-discrimination, and writing analyses and recommendations with the purpose of enhancing women's rights in Serbian community in Kosovo, Aktiv established itself as an organization whose role was recognized and as the pivot for the promotion of the principle of gender equality, and the fight against gender based discrimination and violence by already mentioned conditions.

Bearing in mind the fact that, in addition to this important topic, Aktiv has addressed and devoted itself to the rights of the Serb community in Kosovo, as well as the process of institutional integration of local self-governments and work of soft institutions (funded by the



Republic of Serbia) in Serbian majority municipalities, a kind of merging of these topics into a single framework was a logical consequence of the circumstances. When it comes to gender equality, it permeates all levels of institutions in Kosovo, but the fact that the issue of decision making positions at the local level from the perspective of women coming from minority communities was not addressed until now, further motivated Aktiv to focus on this topic. The symbiosis of subjects of monitoring the implementation of the rules set by law, the work of local institutions, gender equality at the local level and the perception of the role of women in the given frameworks aimed at understanding the context of gender equality at the local level from a much broader perspective than is usual in Kosovo.

By processing the data of Kosovo and Serbian institutions operating in eight Serb-majority municipalities, and conducting anonymous interviews with women in decision making positions, a broader research reach and a deeper understanding of the issue itself were just sought. Previous research that has dealt with the same or similar topics has taken official statistics as a basis, with rare cases of data collection from personalized field surveys (interviews / surveys), and even less often with reference to *soft* institutions funded by the Republic of Serbia. In a comprehensive approach, this research has sought to draw attention to the issue of gender inequality in Kosovo from two perspectives crucial to the development of democracy: minority and gender.



# Methodology

The main objective of this research is to map and determine the distribution of decision-making positions based on the principle of gender equality and the established (domestic and international) legal framework at the local level in Kosovo, with particular focus on local institutions in eight Serb majority municipalities. In addition to the main, specific objective of the research is to make recommendations to responsible institutions based on established facts, ie the distribution of decision making positions at the local level, and illuminating the perception of gender equality within institutions by women (in decision-making positions), all with the purpose of respecting the principle of gender equality.

Given the complexity and importance of the research topic, the research was conducted via **quantitative and qualitative methods**. In the first, quantitative, research phase, data were collected on the distribution of decision making positions with reference to their gender structure. Local institutions of the **eight targeted municipalities** (North Mitrovica, Leposavić, Zubin Potok, Zvečan, Parteš, Gračanica, Novo Brdo and Štrpce) shared official information on the structure of municipal bodies and relevant decision-making positions within the same, based on gender structure. In addition to the local institutions operating in the system of the Republic of Kosovo, the distribution of decision-making positions within the so-called *soft institutions*<sup>1</sup> financed and supported by the Republic of Serbia, was also mapped.

Unlike similar research conducted in Kosovo covering the topic of gender equality and related employment within local institutions, the Aktiv's research team considered it necessary to map decision-making positions of *soft institutions*, given their key symbolic, economic and identity role for the Serb community in Kosovo. The pillars of health

---

<sup>1</sup> Under the term *soft institutions* this research refers to public institutions providing services to citizens (social, medical, educational), which do not interfere with the powers of the executive authority, nor do they possess such authority.



and social care, as well as of education funded by the Republic of Serbia, played an important role in the survival of the Serb community in Kosovo in the post-war period, and still enjoy considerable support and trust. Without going into the legal status and disagreements between Belgrade and Pristina regarding the work of these institutions, the aim of this research was to determine whether the principles of gender equality in decision making positions were respected, without which the data collected would be incomplete and irrelevant, taking into account the impact of soft institutions, and the number of staff employed within them.

In this regard, the data collected in the eight target municipalities with a Serb majority referred to the following decision making positions / institutions: mayors, deputy mayors, deputy mayors for communities, chairmen of municipal assemblies, municipal councilors, and decision-making positions within health, social and educational institutions funded by the Republic of Serbia.

In the second, qualitative, research phase, anonymous interviews were conducted with representatives of local and soft institutions in decision-making positions in all eight targeted municipalities, in order to determine the working environment and conditions in which women perform their functions. The aim of this research phase was to determine whether women in decision making positions encounter obstacles in the performance of their work responsibilities, what are their relationships with peers within institutions, whether they base their decisions and work engagement on the basis of their gender, and what are their views and recommendations regarding gender equality policy in Kosovo.

A comprehensive methodological approach including quantitative and qualitative data, has created a base from which to determine the current state of play from the perspective of distribution of decision making positions based on gender, and also the measures and steps that must be taken to achieve gender equality at the institutional level in Kosovo.



# International legal framework

Since the end of World War II, international organizations have devoted considerable attention to defining concrete steps, measures and ways to combat gender inequality worldwide. Given the complexity and multidimensionality of gender inequality, international organizations have, over the last few decades, tried to map areas where gender inequality is pronounced, and have called on their members to take more decisive action and more concrete measures.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)<sup>2</sup>, which was adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly, has defined and laid the foundations for the measures necessary to take action for the comprehensive inclusion of women in the political decision-making process:

- Article No. 7 guarantees the equality of women in political and public life with a particular focus on the right to vote, participation in political decision-making and "non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country";
- Article No. 8 provides that states parties will guarantee women's equal "opportunity to represent their Government at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations".

In a similar manner, in 2003, the Council of Europe made recommendations to its Member States in the form of a joint **Resolution on the equal participation of women and men in political and public decision-making**<sup>3</sup>, as a guide to empowering women's

---

<sup>2</sup> The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, *United Nations*:

[https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsq\\_no=IV-8&chapter=4&clang=en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsq_no=IV-8&chapter=4&clang=en)

<sup>3</sup> Recommendation of REC (2003) 3 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on equal participation of women and men in political and public decision-making, *European Council*:



inclusion in the political decision-making process. It calls on the members to promote a balanced representativeness and equal distribution of powers in decision making positions and the promotion of equal civil and political rights for men and women, and stresses the need to redefine and adapt internal legislation (of Member States) to enable the implementation of recommended strategies and measures. The resolution introduces **the term of parity thresholds**, which is defined in the final report of the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Equality and Democracy, recommending to States Parties the introduction of "legal / statutory provisions covering the law of parity by establishing parity thresholds, ie. **40% representation of women and men** within government advisory bodies (chambers, committees, working groups, etc.), in elected assemblies", at central as well as local level," with a view to achieving equal participation of women and men and thus ensuring genuine democracy " in society (of Member States).

On the other hand, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions introduced in 2006 the **European Charter on Gender Equality at Local Level**<sup>4</sup>, which calls on Member States to focus their efforts on the equal participation of women and men in the decision-making process, as one of the main preconditions for the existence of democratic societies. In this context, the Charter includes a number of legislative and administrative measures aimed at influencing the governments of the signatory states in their efforts to tackle the problem of gender inequality and unrepresentation in managerial and decision making positions, in particular in the field of politics:

- "The Signatory recognises **the equal rights of women and men** to participate in the formulation and implementation of policy, to hold public office and to perform all public functions at all levels of government;

---

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016805915fb>

<sup>4</sup> The European Charter on Gender Equality at local level, *Council of European Municipalities and Regions*: <https://ravnopravnost.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/European-povelja-o-rodnoj-ravnopravnosti-na-lokalnom-nivou.pdf>





- The Signatory recognizes the principle of **balanced representation** on all elected and public decision-making bodies;
- The Signatory commits itself to promote and apply the principle of **balanced representation** to its own decision-making and consultative bodies, and in its appointments to external bodies.
- The Signatory furthermore commits itself to ensure that no public or political post to which it appoints or elects a representative is, in principle or in practice, restricted to or seen as the normal role of one gender, due to stereotypical attitudes."

Unlike the Council of Europe Resolution, which defines the threshold of recommended gender representativeness in percentage terms, the Charter of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions takes a general approach, focusing on insisting on an equal division of (decision-making) positions between the sexes. Notwithstanding these differences, the aforementioned international documents set the legal and strategic framework for the promotion of gender equality within national (local and central) institutions.



# Definition of decision making position and Kosovo legal framework

The 2003 Council of Europe Recommendation provides a definition of decision-making position: " Public decision-making is concerned with setting and influencing priorities for public policy. Public decision-makers include governments, the senior civil service, higher levels of the judiciary, senior diplomats, leaders in public occupations, those serving on committees established by government and individuals appointed by government to attend to specific public policy matters. Public decision-makers are also persons holding senior positions within enterprises and associations which provide public services and leading positions within trade union and employer organisations. "<sup>5</sup>

Despite the fact that the definition offered by the Council of Europe is of a general nature, it gives the framework and general insight into the scope of what is defined under a decision-making position, giving Member States sufficient leeway to independently regulate the term (both) legally (and administratively). In this regard, in order to clarify the context of the research, it is necessary to look at the Kosovo legal system, and in light of understanding gender equality in institutional frameworks, with a particular focus on decision-making positions.

Law on Gender Equality (No. 05 / L-020) " applies to men, women and persons who have a protected characteristic of gender identity or sex determination, and guarantees equal opportunity and treatment in public and private areas of social life, including political and public life, employment, education, health, economy, social benefits, sport and culture and other areas set out by the present or other law"<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>5</sup> Recommendation REC(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on equal participation of women and men in political and public decision-making, *Council of Europe*

<sup>6</sup> Law on Gender Equality (No. 05/L-020), *Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo*:

<https://abgj.rks-gov.net/assets/cms/uploads/files/ZAKON%20RAVNOPRAVNOSTI%20POLOVA.pdf>



Drawing on the already established international legal practice and frameworks, this Law follows the democratic trends and defines gender equality as one of the foundations and necessary conditions for the development of the state and the rule of law. Guaranteeing gender equality in Kosovo, Article 6 of the Gender Equality Law requires " Equal gender representation in all legislative, executive and judiciary bodies and other public institutions, which is achieved by ensuring **a minimum representation of fifty percent (50%) for each gender**, including their governing and decision-making bodies "<sup>7</sup>. By contrast, the Law on General Elections (no. 03 / L-072) defines that "Each candidate list shall comprise at least **30% certified candidates of the other gender**."<sup>8</sup>, which clearly represents an inconsistent legal approach to regulating equality, given that the Gender Equality Act clearly states the need for equal gender representation in all institutions, especially in political life. Notwithstanding this type of legislative conflict, studies conducted so far in Kosovo have nevertheless shown that the legal threshold of at least 50% of women's participation in central and local institutions is not applied, and that the legal situation is still unsatisfactory, although slight progress towards gender equality can be seen<sup>9</sup>.

Having identified the legal frameworks that determine the conditions for respect for gender equality, it is necessary to also look at those which define the decision-making positions at the local level, which are important for this research. Kosovo Law on Local Self - Government (No. 03 / L-040), in the section on municipal competencies, defines the following bodies, ie decision-making positions in local level institutions:

- Article 10: "The bodies of a municipality are: **Municipal Assembly and Mayor**";

---

<sup>7</sup> Law on General Elections (No. 03 / L-072), *Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo*: [http://www.kqz-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/ZAKON\\_BR.03\\_L-072\\_O\\_LOKALNIM\\_IZBORIMA\\_U\\_REPUBLICI\\_KOSOVO.pdf](http://www.kqz-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/ZAKON_BR.03_L-072_O_LOKALNIM_IZBORIMA_U_REPUBLICI_KOSOVO.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Inclusion of Women in decision-making and local governance in Kosovo, *Kaltrina Temaj*, D4D: [https://d4d-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/D4D\\_PI\\_19\\_ENG\\_FINAL\\_web.pdf](https://d4d-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/D4D_PI_19_ENG_FINAL_web.pdf)



- Article 60.2: "**Deputy Mayor** of Municipality shall be appointed by the Mayor for the same term of office as the Mayor and may be dismissed from office by the Mayor";
- Article 61.1: "There shall be a **Deputy Mayor for Communities** in those municipalities where at least 10% of the citizens belong to non-majority communities.";
- Article 41: "The Municipal Assembly shall elect the **Chairperson of the Municipal Assembly** from among the members";
- Article 62: " The municipal administration shall be organized into **directorates**. Each municipal directorate shall be managed by a **director** who is employed and dismissed by the Mayor".<sup>10</sup>

Having selected key decision-making positions on the basis of established Kosovo laws, the focus of the research during its lifetime was precisely on the above mentioned positions. Although it has been determined during this process that none of the targeted municipalities owns public companies (in their ownership or under its authority), it is important to note that the Law on Public Enterprises (no. 03 / L-087)<sup>11</sup> unfortunately, does not define the need for gender equality in decision-making positions within public enterprises.

Notwithstanding the fact that Kosovo is not a member of the United Nations and the Council of Europe, its constitutional and legal frameworks regarding gender equality have demonstrated a legislative commitment to regulate this matter as defined by these entities of international law. Despite the poor implementation of the laws themselves, some key remedies have been introduced over the last decade, all with the aim of addressing the issue of underrepresentation of women in local and central level institutions. The aforementioned Gender Equality Act, which was introduced in 2015, defined the areas of protection of rights and obligations within

<sup>10</sup> Law on Local Self-Government (No. 03 / L-040), *Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo*: [http://www.assemblyofkosovo.org/common/docs/ligjet/2008\\_03-L040\\_en.pdf](http://www.assemblyofkosovo.org/common/docs/ligjet/2008_03-L040_en.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Law on Public Enterprises (No. 03 / L-087), *Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo*: <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=2547>



which, in the near future, greater engagement of state institutions is required:

- Article 4: "Direct or indirect gender discrimination is prohibited, including less favourable treatment of women for reasons of pregnancy and maternity, marital status, nationality, race, disability, sexual orientation, social status, religion and belief, age or any other basis defined by law or agreement and international instruments in force";
- Article 5: "In order to prevent and eliminate gender discrimination and achieve gender equality, Republic of Kosovo Institutions which include bodies at all levels of legislative, executive, judicial authority and other public institutions shall be responsible to implement legislative and other measures";
- Article 6: "Public institutions shall take temporary special measures in order to accelerate the realization of actual equality between women and men in areas where inequities exist. Special measures could include:
  - quotas to achieve equal representation of women and men,
  - support programs to increase participation of less represented sex in decision making and public life,
  - economic empowerment and steps to improve the position of women or men in the field of labour improvement of equality in education, health, culture and allocation and/or reallocation of resources,
  - preferential treatment, recruitment, hiring and promotion, and other measures in each area where inequalities exist.
- Article 15: "Direct or indirect discrimination on grounds of sex, marital or family status, pregnancy, birth, parenting and each form of custody, in the public or private sectors, is prohibited.";
- Article 17: "Employers in all sectors are obligated " to refrain from including elements of gender discrimination in vacancy announcements; to promote gender equality before and during employment relationship; to ensure equal opportunities for women and men to apply for vacant positions; not to disfavour



a job-seeker by setting rules, criteria or procedural methods which tend to be neutral but in practice are less favorable for persons of a gender constituting indirect gender discrimination.  
„<sup>12</sup>

In addition to this Law, one of the most important institutional initiatives launched to combat gender inequality is *Kosovo Gender Equality Program* (for the period 2008-2013) of the Agency for Gender Equality, which defined the key strategic goals of achieving equality, including in decision-making positions, which was done within the *Better Regulation Strategy 2.0 for Kosovo* (for the period 2017-2021) of the Government of Kosovo. However, well-defined and balanced laws did not result in adequate implementation in practice, as evidenced by the 2019 Institute for Development Policy (INDEP) survey, which states that at local “as well as at central level, unsatisfactory representativeness of women in decision-making positions is still prominent”<sup>13</sup>.

---

<sup>12</sup> Law on Gender Equality, *Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo*

<sup>13</sup> Women in decision making in public institutions in Kosovo, *INDEP*:  
[https://indep.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/INDEP\\_Women-in-decision-making-in-public-institutions-in-Kosovo-1.pdf](https://indep.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/INDEP_Women-in-decision-making-in-public-institutions-in-Kosovo-1.pdf), p. 28

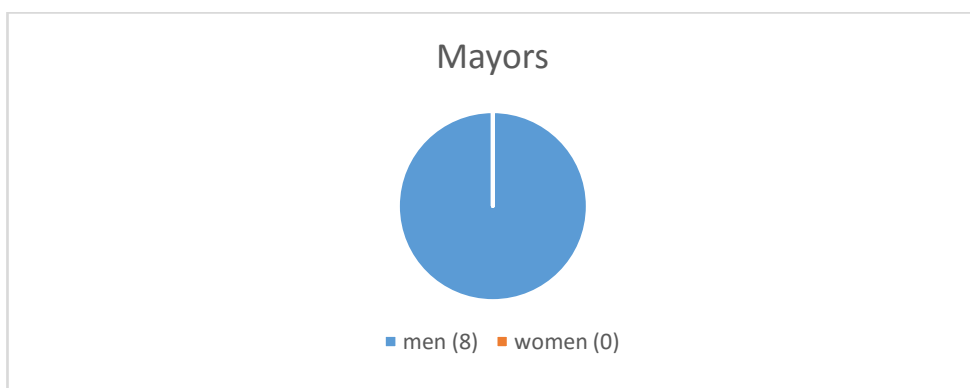


## Quantitative findings

The quantitative findings were formally obtained from local institutions (eight Kosovo municipalities covered by this survey) and represent an up-to-date and objective statistical insight into the distribution (targeting) of decision making positions at the local level by gender.

### Mayors

In all eight targeted municipalities with a Serb majority, the position of elected mayor is held by males. Since the formation of Serb-majority municipalities and their integration into the Kosovo system, no female has been elected to the position of mayor. The situation is similar in all other Kosovo municipalities, where no female is the mayor of any of the 38 municipalities.

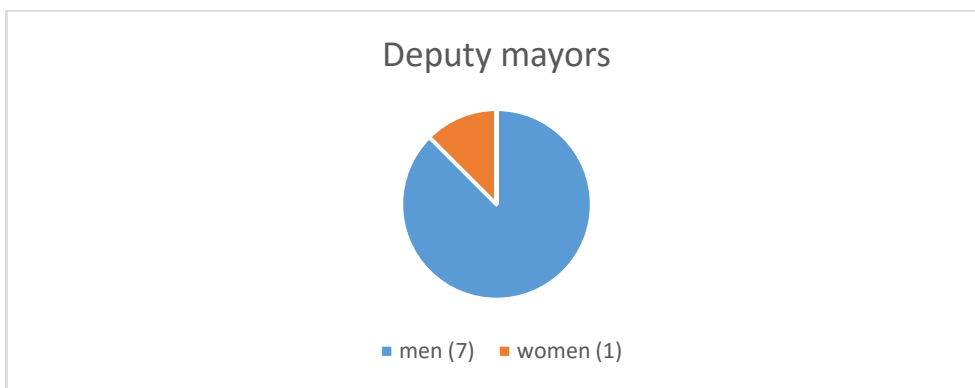


### Deputy Mayors

Of the eight targeted municipalities, the position of Deputy Mayor is exercised by a female member only in Zubin Potok. The disparity in the distribution of the position of deputy mayor stems from the fact that the holders of this position (under the Kosovo system), along with the informal automatism, characteristic of Serbian-majority municipalities, are mayors within the system of the Republic of Serbia,

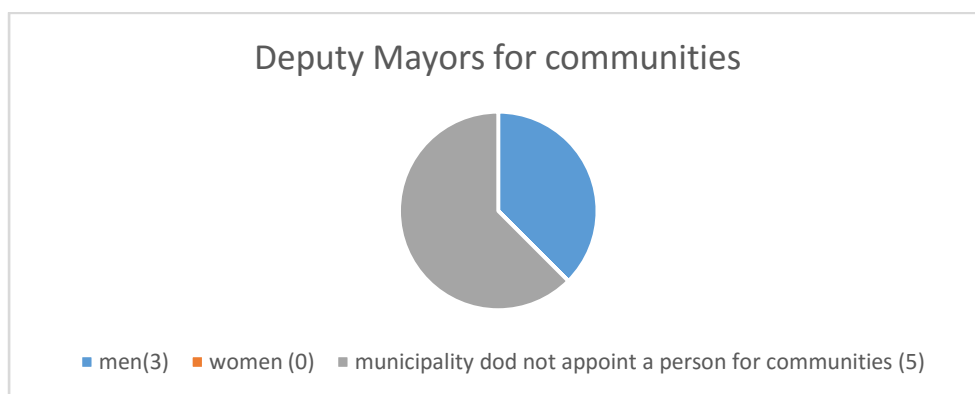


where male dominance is also noticeable in decision-making positions.



### Deputy Mayors in charge of communities

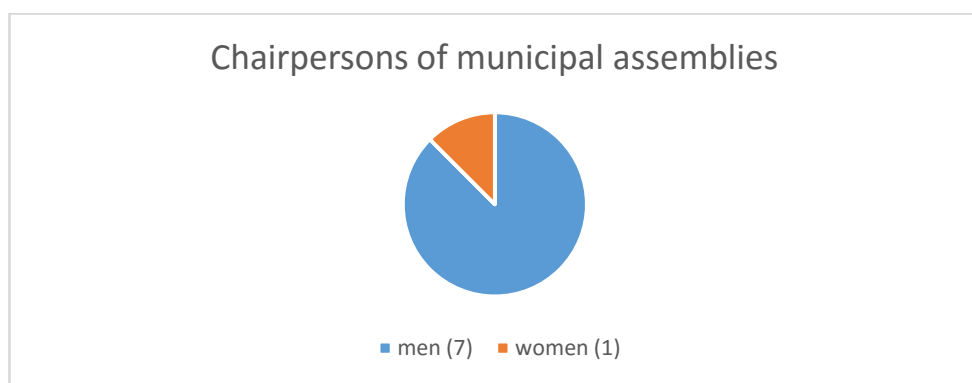
According to the official information available, five municipalities have not appointed persons to serve as deputy mayors in charge of communities, while in the case of the municipalities of Zubin Potok, Novo Brdo and Štrpce, this function is carried out by men (Albanian). Although the Law on Local Self-Government stipulates that in municipalities where non-majority communities exceed the threshold of 10% of the total population of the municipality, a deputy mayor for communities should be appointed, in five targeted municipalities no officials in these positions have yet been appointed.





## Chairpersons of Municipal Assemblies

While the positions of chairpersons in local assemblies in seven targeted municipalities are performed by male persons, this function is performed by a female person only in the case of the Municipality of Zvečan. Although a key position in the decision-making process at the local level, only five more women hold this position<sup>14</sup> in all Kosovo municipalities.



## Members of municipal assemblies

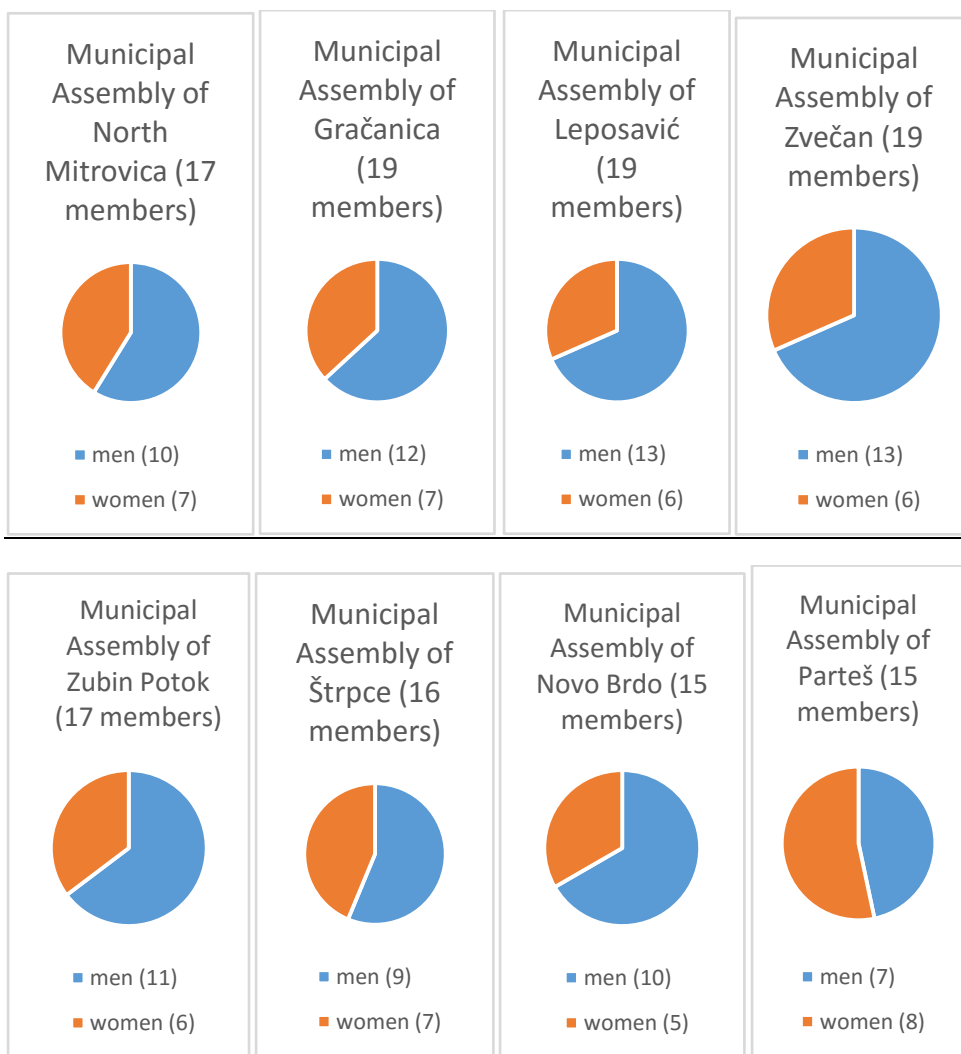
Law on Local Elections (No. 03 / L-072) provides that, when forming municipal assemblies, **a minimum 30% of members** must be female<sup>15</sup>. Despite the fact that the statutory quota is met in all eight targeted municipalities, in most of the municipalities female members constitute between 31% and 45%, while only in the Municipality of Partesh the number of female members exceeds 50%.

<sup>14</sup> Inclusion of Women in decision-making and local governance in Kosovo, *Kaltrina Temaj*, p. 17

<sup>15</sup> Law on Local Elections (No. 03 / L-072), *Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo*:

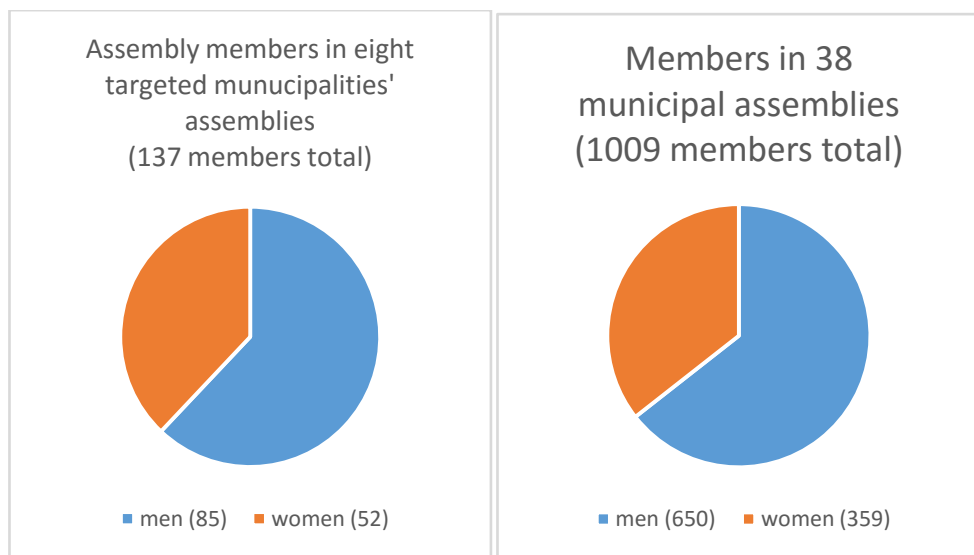
[http://www.kgz-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/ZAKON\\_BR.03\\_L-072\\_O\\_LOKALNIM\\_IZBORIMA\\_U\\_REPUBLICI\\_KOSOVO.pdf](http://www.kgz-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/ZAKON_BR.03_L-072_O_LOKALNIM_IZBORIMA_U_REPUBLICI_KOSOVO.pdf)





Out of 137 members in eight targeted municipalities, **38% are female members**. Comparing the situation with the total number of female members in all municipal assemblies in Kosovo, where their share is 36%, it is indicative that Serb majority municipalities do follow general trends, and that the situation is practically mirrored in all municipalities.

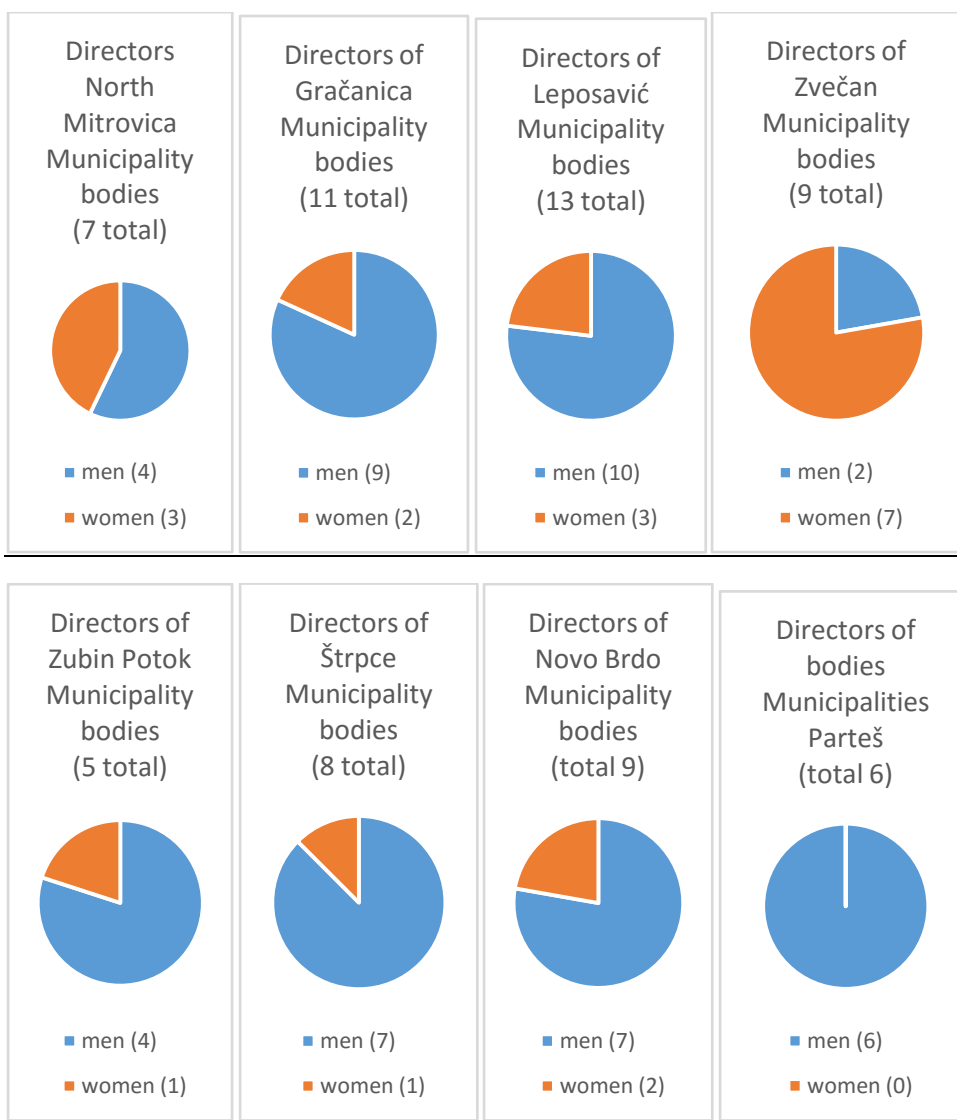




## Directors of municipal bodies (departments)

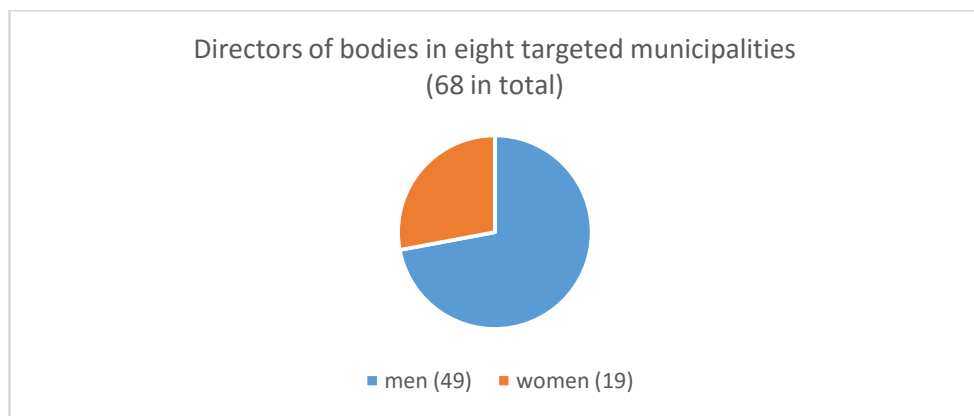
In addition to the problem of the absence of the formation of all municipal departments provided for by law, the survey also found that men in most of the departments formed act as directors. Except Zvečan Municipality, where **78% of directors** are females, in the rest, the distribution of directorships favors the opposite sex. Here is an interesting and noticeable disproportion in the Municipality of Partesh, where there are more female members in the assembly than male members, while there are no female members in the positions of directors of municipal bodies or departments.





Out of a total of 68 positions of department directors in eight targeted municipalities, **28%** belongs to females. However, if one takes into account the fact that only in the municipalities of Zvečan and North Mitrovica the share of female directors exceeds 30%, it shows that the principle of equal distribution of decision making positions is considerably violated.

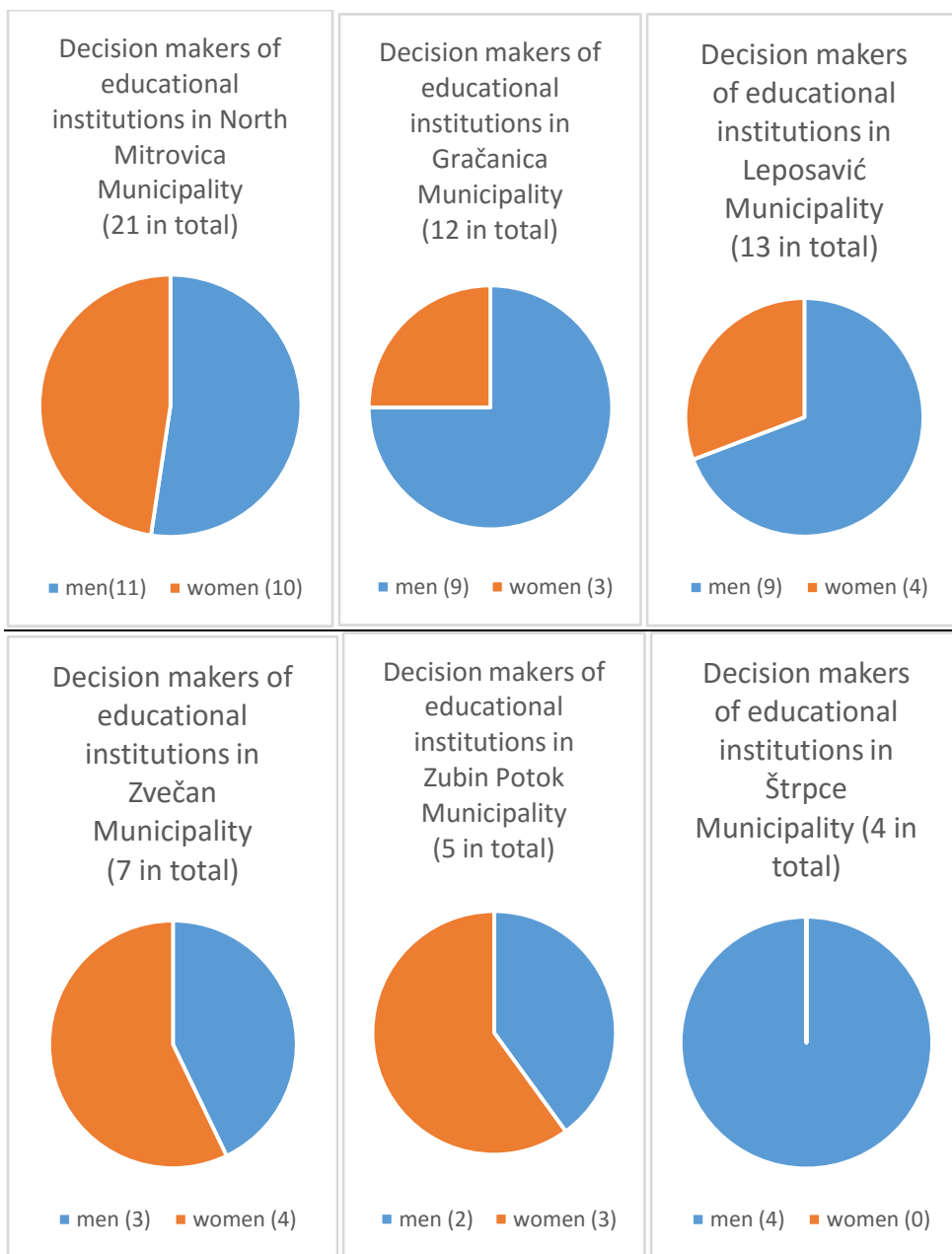


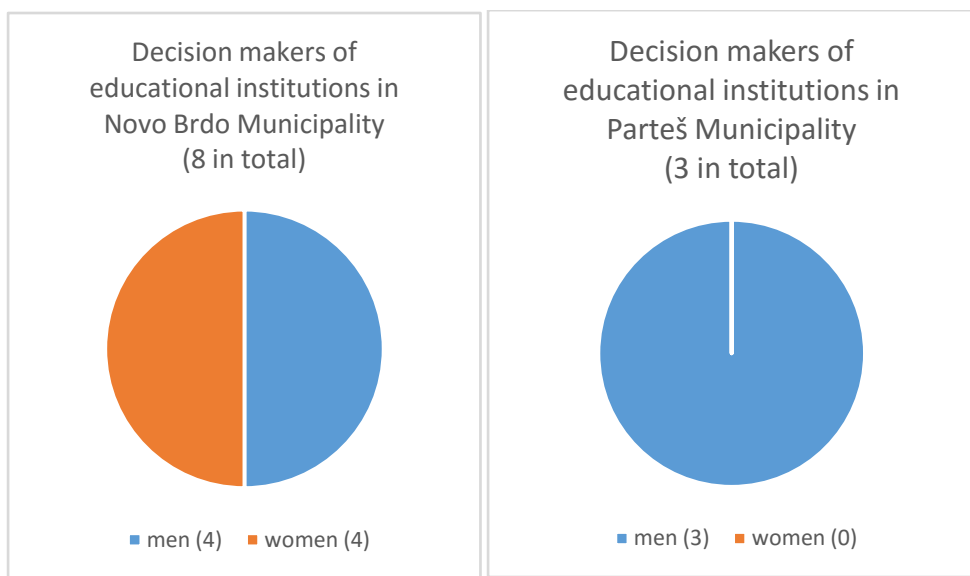


## Decision-makers of educational institutions

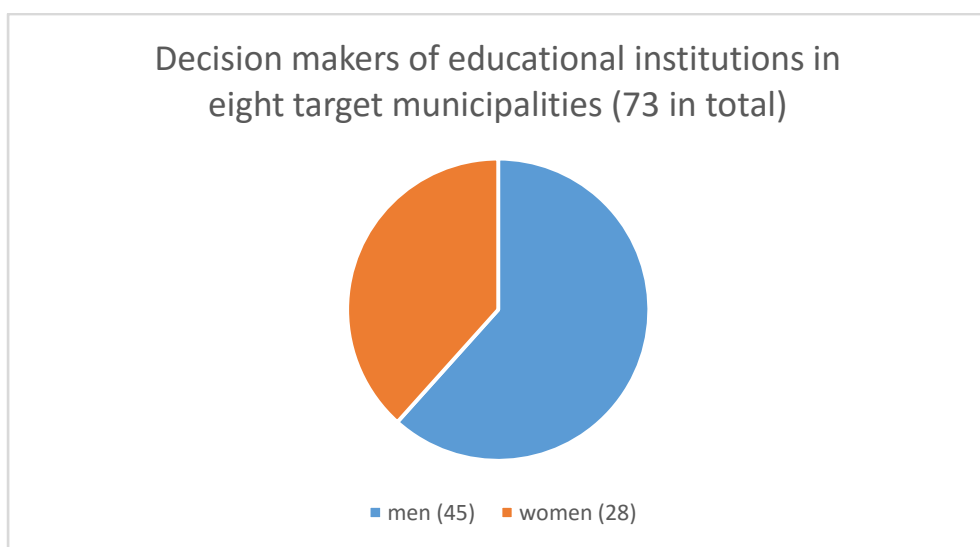
Decision-makers of educational institutions in Kosovo financed by the Republic of Serbia during this research include the directors of preschool, elementary, secondary, vocational, university, as well as other institutions that fall under educational categorization. In the municipalities of North Mitrovica (48%), Novo Brdo (50%), Zvečan (57%) and Zubin Potok (60%), there is an even distribution of decision-making positions, with a potential tendency for an increase in the number of women in decision-making positions. The situation is unenviable in the municipalities of Štrpce and Parteš, where no female person holds the position of decision-maker, while in the municipalities of Gračanica and Leposavić, decision-making positions are in most cases assigned to persons of the opposite sex.





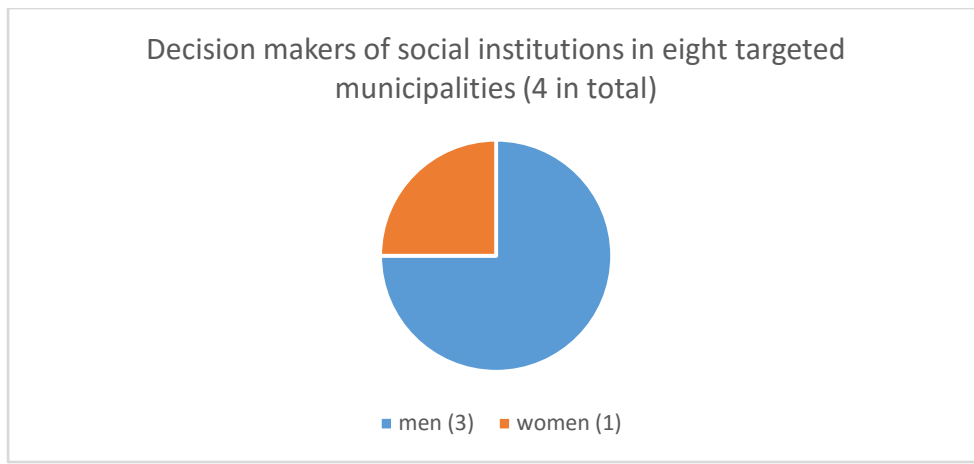


As in the case of percentage participation of female members of assemblies in eight targeted municipalities, the same percentage - 38%, represents the share of decision-makers (women) of educational institutions funded by the Republic of Serbia. The ratio between the positions held by men and women within these institutions would probably be different if, in the case of the municipalities of Parteš and Štrpce, there were female directors of educational institutions.



## Decision-makers of social institutions

Out of the total of four offices of the Republic Pension and Disability Insurance Fund (established within the system of the Republic of Serbia), only the branch of this social institution in Štrpce has a female as the decision-maker, while this is not the case in the offices in North Mitrovica, Gračanica and Pasjane (Municipality of Parteš).



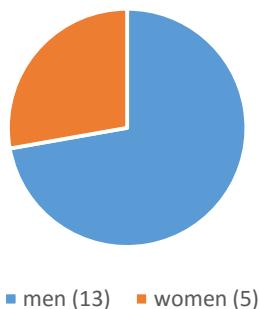
## Decision-makers of health institutions

Health institutions functioning under the auspices of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia, as well as the offices of the Republican Health Insurance Fund, have their offices in all eight Serbian municipalities analyzed during the survey. In decision making positions in 18 health care institutions, only 5 women hold directorships, two of which are in decision making positions in Gračanica Municipality.



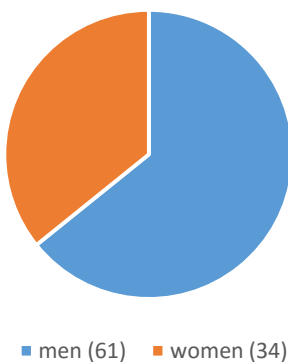


Decision makers of health institutions in eight targeted municipalities (18 in total)



Out of a total of 95 decision making positions in educational institutions and health and social care institutions financed by the Republic of Serbia, **36%** is occupied by female persons, which is just over one third.

Decision makers of institutions funded by the Republic of Serbia in eight targeted Kosovo municipalities (95 in total)



# Qualitative findings

## Perceptions of women in decision making positions

Anonymous interviews were conducted during the survey with female decision-makers in all eight targeted municipalities, including soft institutions funded by the Republic of Serbia. The survey of respondents who manage local institutions and municipal departments within both systems analyzed aimed to produce findings that contribute to the overall insight into the work of women in decision making positions.

The interviews conducted focused on the personal perspectives of female decision-makers, on the (potential) impact of the work environment on their work and decision making, and their recommendations and requirements for improving the position of women, not only in decision making positions, but also in public and private sector in general. Thus, when asked about the existence of (un)representativeness of women in decision making positions at the local level, all interviews showed the absence of gender equality in this field, where the respondents most often emphasized the need to empower and inform women about their rights, and the need for institutions to be more transparent in the recruitment process (in terms of supporting female applicants to apply). The thing that emerges as a constant when answering this question is that respondents often emphasized that there was noticeable progress towards gender balance in the direction of equal distribution of decision making positions, but that, as the majority of respondents pointed out, it depends solely on individual cases, mainly women who have been informed on their rights, and who insist on law enforcement and respect for the principle of gender equality. The positive tone that the respondents used to speak about the current situation stems from the fact that, as has been emphasized on several occasions, women in decision making positions are working to significantly improve the current unenviable position. In this regard,



the need for a more engaged institutional strategy for informing women about labour rights (within institutions) guaranteed by the law, and breaking the taboos on the reservation of decision making positions for men, was emphasized.

In spite of the fact that during all interviews the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions at the local level was emphasized, the statement about the positive working atmosphere present in the institutions where they were employed was repeated, emphasizing the support in work received from their male colleagues. This is one of the key and surprising findings of this research, given that the interviews were of a strictly anonymous character, and that the respondents provided their answers in an informal atmosphere, without the presence of any kind of external pressure. Opinions shared during the interviews showed that female respondents see the problem in central institutions, on which the implementation of gender mainstreaming at all levels and in both sectors depends, while local level institutions/departments are characterized by gradual progress towards gender equality, stemming solely from initiatives coming from the local level. This is supported by the respondents' answers about the general working environment and atmosphere within which they perform decision making functions, which were unambiguously positive, with a tendency of improvement of the situation in a better direction.

If the previous conclusions from the interviews revealed clear unanimity in the answers received, when it comes to respecting women's work contributions within institutions, part of the answers was not unambiguous. Namely, on several occasions, women in decision making positions have stressed that they are not sure whether the contribution of their work is sufficiently appreciated and how their engagement is valued. Without receiving a more detailed explanation of this attitude, and based on the answers regarding the perception of their decision-making position and consequential acceptance by the collective (as equal members of the same), it can be concluded that in some cases the valorisation of women's work contribution (in decision making positions) is still insufficient. In



addition, the presence (though not widespread) of beliefs about inequality and a sense of adequate acceptance, based solely on the fact of gender, indicates a lack of involvement of relevant institutions, as well as work collectives, in changing such narratives, which are intangible in public but are still very much present.

Furthermore, in terms of the structure of the workforce in which the respondents are employed, approximately half of the respondents believe that the structure reflects only to a certain extent the principle of equal division of jobs by gender. When the answer was either neutral or slightly negative, the argument followed whose essence was that the room for maneuver for achieving gender equality within the local institutions was still quite large, and that a more serious and dedicated effort was needed to strike the necessary balance (between genders). Respondents often cited two most influential positions at the local level as examples of bad practice - the mayor and deputy mayor - which, in Kosovo, virtually without exception, are functions performed by male persons, which, as they stressed, is a problem for which they do not believe it will be resolved in nearer future, that is, adapted to the culture and principles of gender equality.

It is worrying that a considerable number of respondents, when asked about information on cases of discrimination against women, victims of sexism or mobbing in the workplace, replied that, unfortunately, they had the opportunity to hear about such cases and that not one (internal or external) legal process was initiated based on that. Although we're talking about a considerable number, it is evident that cases of discrimination and various types of harassment still exist, and that, as emphasized by the respondents, victims do not report such cases to the competent authorities, which actually empowers the discriminators and gives them space to continue to endanger females (not just in the workplace). Although significantly smaller in number than those who witnessed or heard about discrimination and harassment of women, it is even more worrying and alarming that some respondents were direct victims of some of these types of discrimination. Despite the fact that during the interview more



information was not received regarding these individual cases (such information was not requested out of respect for the respondents' privacy, but also because of their anonymity), it is obvious that women (especially those working locally) still have fear and are not sufficiently empowered and supported (by institutions) to report cases of discrimination.

On the other hand, the attitudes of women interviewed in decision making positions about their decision-making within the institutions where they exercise their functions, are encouraging. Namely, when asked whether they weigh or adjust their decisions on the basis of their gender or the gender of their subordinate or superior work staff, in no case was a positive response received. However, in a minority of cases, it was emphasized that respondents were unsure whether their decisions were perceived differently or encountered obstacles to implementation, simply because they were female decision makers. The confusion shared by the respondents during the interview stems from the fact that it is impossible to trace the reasons for poor decision execution or absence thereof, and thus whether the manner of (non)execution of the decision is directly proportionate to the gender of the decision-maker. The very fact that some respondents had doubts about the execution of the decisions suggests that, although on the sidelines, there are still cases where the decisions of the decision makers were observed through the prism of their gender. Regardless of gender, all respondents indicated that they did not make their decisions based on the ethnic, religious or racial structure of the working staff with whom they were directly or indirectly connected, which encourages and demonstrates a high degree of tolerance within local institutions, at least from perspectives of women decision makers.

In the second, more general part of the interview, decision makers were asked if, generally speaking, there was room for improvement of women's rights in Kosovo, and therefore in the local community of residence. An unambiguous, without exception, affirmative response provides insight into the current state of facts, without regard to individual perceptions of its type or nature. Asking respondents to



designate a subject or institution as a key actor that should be further engaged in addressing gender inequality (in institutions and beyond) in Kosovo, a wide range of responses was offered, starting with the whole of Kosovo society, local communities, central institutions, to more specific entities such as the Ombudsperson, local coordinators for gender equality, and women who are already in decision making positions (at central and local level). When asked to propose measures that, through personal involvement, could contribute to the improvement of gender equality within the institutions they work in, respondents stated that, if given the opportunity, they would employ more women, they would publicly promote the principles of gender equality in the local community, they would enable their female colleagues to make more public appearances (where they would, through a higher degree of exposure, demonstrate to the local public that women were a very important and present factor), but would also organize trainings to enable employed women to learn more about their rights (since they are often uninformed about that in most cases) and ways to protect them.

At the end of the interview, the respondents were asked to name five problems, which, if appropriate, they would raise to address the problem of the unrepresentation of women in workplaces:

- providing employment opportunities for women within local institutions, with clear indications of reserved places for women, and transparent, media-visible and unambiguous calls for applications;
- respect and more intensive and effective implementation of legal and constitutional provisions regarding gender equality within institutions;
- encouraging women to apply for decision making positions;
- cooperation with non-governmental organizations dealing with gender issues and the right to work;
- introducing punishment for local institutions that do not respect the legally defined principles of equality (in the workplace);



- organizing trade unions aimed at protecting women's labor rights, their greater representation in the decision-making process, and protecting them from discrimination (as a kind of first-degree refuge);
- strengthening institutional, administrative and legal mechanisms to protect women from discrimination in the workplace, but also in general;
- informing and raising public awareness of the existence of gender inequality not only at the institutional level, but throughout Kosovo, through the media with the highest number of end users.

## Conclusions and recommendations

As the survey of eight Serbian-majority-targeted municipalities has shown, these local self-government units, as well as throughout Kosovo, still face a lot of institutional involvement, law enforcement, public awareness and building of capacities on which the principles of gender equality rest, all with a view to improving the position of women within institutions. These measures are particularly valid when it comes to decision making positions. The importance of decision making positions is reflected not only in respecting the legally defined principles of gender equality, but also in a degree of symbolism, which could play a significant role in improving and strengthening women's rights in Kosovo.

**1. Quantitative research has shown that men still occupy most, if not all, key positions at local governments and soft institutions.** Although there is clear progress in terms of the involvement of more women in local level institutions, it is a noticeable constant of informal practice that the most important positions on that, but also on higher levels are held predominantly by men. **The very fact that there is not a single female Mayor among the eight targeted municipalities, and only one female deputy, shows the alarmingness of this situation and**



flagrant violation of the principle of gender equality in political life, and calls for decisive steps towards the political emancipation of women in all communities in Kosovo.

2. Making no distinction between female decision makers employed within Kosovo or Serbian institutions, which, as determined by this survey, does not actually exist (from the perspective of gender inequality), it can be concluded that the Council of Europe recommended parity threshold of 40% of women's representation was not respected at the local level in eight targeted municipalities. Although it is possible to find examples of good practice in some targeted municipalities, the exceptions do not go beyond the already established framework - gender inequalities in decision making positions at the local level.

3. The survey showed that the percentage of female assembly members in eight targeted municipalities could be set as a positive example of respect of (legally defined) principles of gender equality. However, in all municipalities, the percentage of female councilors in local assemblies seems to be only so close to the threshold, just for the sake of compliance with the rules. **The dominant position of men in decision making positions is not mitigated by a single legal quota, which is in fact an indicator of misdefined mechanisms for establishing gender equality. Moreover, narratives about stereotypical so-called traditional jobs reserved for women continue to have a significant impact on the division (distribution) of decision making positions at local level institutions.**

4. The qualitative part of the research provided areas where institutions need to be further engaged to address the problems faced by women in local institutions, and especially those faced by women in decision making positions. **This part of the survey exposed the widespread belief in the diminishing presence of endangering women's rights in the workplace, and the problems they face when performing their duties or making decisions. The survey found that discrimination against women in the workplace remains widespread and unsanctioned.** Anonymous interviews indicated that it was necessary to establish new or different mechanisms of protection for





women working within local institutions, because the existing ones did not produce results so far. In this regard, the proposed mechanisms and steps towards improving the current situation, which were shared by the respondents during the research, are of great importance.

Since several areas have been identified during the research that require urgent intervention by local and central institutions, the following is a list of measures needed to reduce gender inequality at the local level, as well as throughout Kosovo:

- Respect for the existing legal framework, with more intensive involvement of competent institutions in monitoring and controlling its implementation.
- Modification of existing and submission of new laws in order to avoid already established incompatibility of laws covering the same area (in this case, gender equality).
- Political entities, or parties, should respect the legally defined principles of gender equality in the political sphere, in order for the equality to reflect consequently to the equal gender structure of local institutions, especially leading positions and assembly members.
- The necessity of introducing new mechanisms to protect victims of discrimination against women, occurring within local institutions.
- It is desirable for the non-governmental sector to participate in the control and monitoring of gender mainstreaming in the work of local institutions.
- Launching projects, campaigns and initiatives aimed at raising women's awareness of their rights, as well as expanding their knowledge of the mechanisms available to protect them. Central level of government should play an indispensable role in this endeavor.
- **Recommendations and mechanisms suggested by respondents given during the interviews conducted within this research (p. 18).**





*This publication is supported by the Olof Palme Center  
and it in no way reflects the views of this institution.*