

Beyond the Gender Quota: Increasing Women's Representation within the Executive Branch and Political Parties

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Executive Summary

In Kosovo, discussions on gender representation in political processes usually focus on the 30% legal quota in legislative institutions, both at the central and local levels. This quota is often used as an argument that women already have sufficient space in politics and that no further progress can be made by the country in this regard.

However, this analysis expands the discussion beyond representation in assemblies. It examines women's role within the executive branch, especially in appointed positions wielding greater political power and influence, especially in Kosovo's context. Simultaneously, it considers the manner in which political parties, as key actors in the selection of senior officials, influence gender representation in these positions. The analysis also delivers concrete recommendations on strengthening gender representation policies at the central and local level.

As a first step, the analysis presents the degree of gender representation within the executive, namely the Government of Kosovo, focusing on three key positions that are completely dependent on political parties: Deputy Prime Ministers, Ministers and Deputy Ministers. This section also breaks down appointments within governing coalitions, as an essential factor to understand barriers and spaces for advancing gender representation.

Secondly, the analysis reviews the municipal level, examining gender representation in municipal directorates, party candidates in mayoral races, as well as appointments to the seat of deputy mayor and speaker of municipal assemblies. Furthermore, internal structures of political parties such as presidencies, steering councils and local branches are analyzed, emphasizing that it is precisely at these levels that the main challenges to gender representation arise, which are then reflected in executive positions and appointments.

The findings reveal the adversity to women's representation in political leadership positions, while women are often portrayed as culprits for such a situation. Data from several interviews with parliamentary candidates in the 2025 elections, were also used for this analysis.

In conclusion, the analysis seeks to contribute to designing more effective policies for equal gender representation in appointed positions at central and local level, by providing a set of practical recommendations on improving the current situation.

Why Is Women's Representation in Politics Important?

Women's representation in politics is one of the most basic indicators of a functioning democracy. In a society like Kosovo's, where women and men account for almost equal parts of the population, it would be natural for public institutions to reflect this social reality. However, this balance is yet to be achieved. This is not just a challenge for Kosovo, as countries with developed democracies have also gone through decades of efforts, reforms, and public pressure to ensure that women have equal access to decision-making. In this context, increasing women's representation in politics is not only a matter of equality, but a necessity to improve the quality of governance itself and achieve sustainable social development. Below are some of the arguments that make such inclusion indispensable.

First of all, women are perceived by the general public as less prone to corruption.¹ This is an important opportunity for better, more transparent and more accountable governance. In a country that sees the fight against corruption as one of the top priorities of constituents, women's inclusion in politics is not only a matter of equality, but also a matter of quality of governance.

Secondly, women's inclusion in politics has a direct impact on the quality of public policies. Research and experiences from many countries show that women tend to pay more attention to issues related to family, social policy, health, education, and conflict resolution.² These are essential areas for society's sustainable devel-

opment and are often granted lower priority when decision-making is dominated only by men.

Thirdly, there is a significant misunderstanding in Kosovo: the fact that there is a gender quota in the Assembly and in municipal assemblies creates the impression that the problem of gender representation has been solved. This quota does not solve the biggest challenges such as representation in appointed positions in the executive branch, where political decisions are made and real power is exercised.

However, without a gender quota it is very likely that women's representation in executive institutions, ministries, municipalities, and key appointed positions, would be even lower. Governing coalitions between multiple parties exacerbate the situation, since when a party may only appoint a few positions, they are usually given to men.

Gender equality is not just a political objective, but it is a matter of sustainable social development and inclusiveness in policy development. Gender-balanced institutions make more inclusive decisions, reflect the needs of a wider range of constituents, and contribute to a more democratic, less polarizing, and more accountable political culture.

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- 1 Decarolis, F., Fisman, R., Pinotti, P., Vannutelli, S., & Wang, Y. (2022). *Gender and bureaucratic corruption: Evidence from two countries*. *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization*.
Frank, B., Schulze, G. G., & Henkel, S. (2011). *Gender differences in corruption behaviour: experimental evidence*. *Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics*.
Dollar, D., Fisman, R., & Gatti, R. (2001). *Gender and corruption*. *Journal of Development Economics*.
 - 2 Bratton, K. A., & Ray, L. P. (2002). *Descriptive representation, policy outcomes, and municipal day-care coverage in Norway*. *American Journal of Political Science*.
Krause, J., Krause, W., & Bränfors, P. (2018). *Women's participation in peace negotiations and the durability of peace*. *International Interactions*.

Legal Framework for Equal Representation

Overall, Kosovo has built a consolidated legal and institutional framework for gender equality, which aims to integrate the principle of gender equality into all public policies and decision-making structures. This framework is based on the Constitution, primary legislation and bylaws, and provides clear obligations for public institutions in terms of promoting equal gender representation, preventing discrimination, and advancing women in public and political life. In this context, gender equality is treated as a horizontal principle, applicable at all levels of government and institutional sectors, including the composition and functioning of the Government.

An important horizontal legal framework that governs the composition of government, is the Law on Gender Equality (2015). This law establishes gender equality as a fundamental value and binding principle for all public institutions in Kosovo. It requires equal gender representation, defined as at least 50 percent representation for each gender, in the legislative, executive and judicial powers, as well as in public institutions and decision-making structures at all levels. The law requires public authorities to take proactive measures to ensure gender balance in appointments, leadership positions, and policy-making processes, treating gender equality not as a political preference, but as a legal obligation. Consequently, the composition of the government, including the appointments of Ministers and Deputy Ministers, must be in line with this requirement, regardless of political agreements within the governing coalitions.

The Law on Government defines the composition of the Government, providing that the Government is composed of the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers and Ministers. This composition is based on the principle of equal gender representation, in accordance with the Constitution and applicable legislation. However, this law does not determine the number of Ministers or Deputy Ministers. This number can vary depending on the preferences and compromises between political parties upon establishment of a governing coalition, and is determined through an internal government act.

In addition to gender equality, community representation is an essential element of the government's composition. The Law on Government refers directly to the Constitution to regulate this issue. Article 96 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, on Ministries and Representation of Communities, stipulates that there must be at least one (1) Minister from the Kosovo Serb community and one (1) Minister from another non-majority community in Kosovo. If the Government has more than twelve (12) Ministers, then there must also be a third Minister representing a non-majority community in Kosovo. Also, the Constitution guarantees at least two (2) Deputy Ministers from the Kosovo Serb community and two (2) Deputy Ministers from other non-majority communities, with additional positions of Deputy Ministers in case the number of Ministers exceeds twelve (12).

In this context, the Constitution regulates the representation of communities, the Law on Government determines the composition and general functions of the executive, while internal government acts determine the number of Ministers, Deputy Ministers and political advisors, ensuring that all these are in accordance with the constitutional guarantees and binding requirements of the Law on Gender Equality.

Structural Challenges to Women's Political Participation

Women's representation in politics in Kosovo still remains limited due to a combination of structural, cultural, and institutional challenges. Politically engaged women face online gender-based violence, manifested through threats, insults and attacks on social media, which amount to a psychological and social barrier to active participation. This challenge is also reflected in the Second Vulnerability Index in Kosovo, where gender-based disinformation is identified as the second most vulnerable area to disinformation.³ In addition to these challenges, the political cost of engagement, including personal expenses for campaigns and coping with high expectations from political parties, often weigh more heavily on women than male candidates.

Furthermore, the lack of institutional support and equality in unpaid jobs, such as family and home care, dilutes the time and energy women can invest in political careers. The many responsibilities that stem from social expectations to balance different roles, from family to public duties, create an environment where gender representation is difficult to achieve and maintain. According to "The Cost of Politics in Kosovo" study, the financial burden of inclusion in politics reinforces existing inequalities and limits equal representation. Women candidates face greater obstacles due to weaker support from political parties, unequal access to sponsorship, and additional family and social responsibilities, which together reduce their competitiveness in electoral processes.⁴ These barriers require sustainable measures, including institutional support, mentorship, and policies that help women balance public engagements and private life.

1. Online gender-based violence

Virtual violence against women in politics has become a serious and increasingly worrying problem, which directly limits their political participation and negatively affects self-confidence, security, and motivation for public engagement. This form of violence entails direct threats, defamation, public contempt, insults and deliberate attacks on social media, which seek to discredit women personally and professionally. For women running for seats in the Assembly, online violence often turns into a source of emotional stress, psychological pressure, and fear for their own safety and that of their families. As one parliamentary candidate points out, women face particular challenges in public discourse, being the subject of more aggressive attacks on social media, compared to their male colleagues.⁵

Specifically, in Kosovo, women in politics face high levels of online violence, manifested through the use of misogynistic language, which intensifies significantly during electoral campaigns. According to the monitoring of civil society organizations, constituent comments in online spaces are of different natures, but to a large extent they focus on gender stereotypes, creating direct parallels between the fact that the candidates are women and the assumptions that they do not possess the skills or competencies to lead political or decision-making processes.⁶

This misogynistic language, which in the vast majority of cases is produced by men, has seen steady growth, especially during the 2025 elections. Women continue to be the main target of gender-based

3 Democracy Plus. (2024). *Second Vulnerability Index*. Prishtina, Kosovo.

4 Krasniqi, A. (2025). *The Cost of Politics in Kosovo: Understanding Financial Barriers to Inclusive Political Participation*. Democracy Plus.

5 Personal interview with a parliamentary candidate. November, 2025, Prishtinë.

6 D4D. (2022). *Online Violence Against Women in Politics: What Measures Can We Take*. Policy Report.

The data clearly shows this worrying trend: in 2023, **89.6%** of hate speech comments were written **by men**, while only **10.4% were written by women. This disparity** deepened even further in 2025, when **96.2%** of comments with misogynistic and hateful content came **from men**, compared to just **3.8% from women.**⁷

disinformation, online violence, and misogynistic discourses, which aim not only to delegitimize their political role, but also to discourage their active participation in public life.

The data clearly shows this worrying trend: in 2023, 89.6% of hate speech comments were written by men, while only 10.4% were written by women. This disparity deepened even further in 2025, when 96.2% of comments with misogynistic and hateful content came from men, compared to just 3.8% from women.⁷ These figures prove not only the increase in the intensity of online violence, but also its deeply gendered character, highlighting the need for institutional interventions and effective mechanisms for preventing and addressing digital violence against women in politics.

A concrete and worrying case that illustrates the use of misogynistic language against women in politics, is the case of the attacks of the mayoral candidate Sami Lushtaku against the MP Mrs. Ardiana Matoshi in 2025. Initially, the attacks and accusations started online, but the situation intensified during a show on Dukagjini Plus, where Mr. Lushtaku addressed the moderator talking about Mrs. Matoshi with extremely derogatory and misogynistic language, using expressions that sought to denigrate not only her professional capacities, but also her personal image and dignity. This case clearly shows how women in politics often face direct verbal attacks,

which not only undermine their public authority, but also create an atmosphere of fear and hinder women's active participation in political processes.

Online gender-based violence against women in politics poses a serious obstacle to their equal participation, negatively impacting safety, self-confidence, and public engagement. It manifests itself through misogynistic language, threats, slander and disinformation, which intensify especially during electoral campaigns and seek to delegitimize the political role of women. Data and concrete cases prove that this violence has a deeply gendered character and creates an intimidating and discouraging effect on women's inclusion in political life.

2. Political Cost and Financial Challenges

Political participation is also closely linked to elevated financial costs, which often are unaffordable for many individuals. Consequently, the financial burden of political engagement falls largely on the candidates themselves, who struggle to secure the necessary funding for an electoral campaign. Under such circumstances, many candidates are forced to spend personal savings, rely on family members' contributions, or even take out bank loans to cover campaign expenses. Overall, candidates who spent the most during the campaign were signifi-

7 Hoti, I. (2025, 8 December). Raporti NDI/D4D: *Online violence against women is more advanced*. Kallxo.com. Accessible: <https://kallxo.com/lajm/raporti-ndi-d4d-dhuna-online-ndaj-grave-ne-politiken-e-kosoves-sa-shtohet-e-behet-me-e-sofistikuar/>

cantly more likely to secure a seat in the Assembly of Kosovo. The data shows that 7 out of 8 winning candidates have spent over 10 thousand Euros, and 3 out of 4 candidates who have invested between 2,500 and 7,999 Euros have managed to win seats. In contrast, no candidate who has spent less than 2,500 Euros has managed to be elected.⁸

However, women face even greater obstacles in the process. They often have weaker support networks, face greater limitations to access financial resources, and enjoy fewer opportunities for media exposure, compared to their male counterparts. Business networks, dominated mainly by men, rarely support women candidates, as they are not perceived as safe “assets” that can be turned into political or economic investments in the future.⁹ This situation further deepens gender inequalities in political participation and fundamentally limits women’s opportunities to compete on a level playing field. In addition, women often carry additional family-related responsibilities, while also facing traditional social expectations and norms that limit their political engagement, which are elaborated in the following section.

3. Unpaid jobs and numerous family responsibilities

Another significant barrier to women’s participation in politics relates to the burden of unpaid work and societal expectations to balance family responsibilities with public engagement. Childcare, housework, and caring for other relatives, continue to fall mostly on women, which are still perceived as their “natural obligations”. These traditional gender roles create a constant physical and emotional load, which is rarely shared equally with male candidates, who typically have more time space and support to focus on political activities.

Consequently, women candidates have less time, flexibility and energy to fully engage in electoral campaigns or in the exercise of public office. Women spend about 44% more time than men doing unpaid household chores.¹⁰ This structural inequality is directly reflected on the ground, where women often feel penalized compared to men. As one woman candidate says, in addition to political engagement, she faces many other obligations towards her family and children, which put exacerbate her already unfavorable position during the electoral campaign.¹¹ These experiences clearly illustrate that gender inequalities in the division of unpaid labor continue to constitute a real and lasting obstacle to the equal representation of women in politics.

4. Limited access to political and media networks

Women in politics often encounter serious barriers in accessing formal and informal networks of power, including party structures, party decision-making mechanisms, and media platforms. Major decision-making within political parties often takes place in informal male-dominated spaces, where women’s involvement remains minimal or completely absent. This inequality is also reflected in the public sphere: during the 2025 elections, electoral debates were dominated by male candidates, who accounted for 92% of participants, while women represented only 8%.¹²

These practices significantly limit the opportunities for women candidates to position themselves on favorable electoral lists, influence political agendas, and build a resilient public profile. A significant case during the race for the capital proves the systematic exclusion of women from media spaces: not all candidates were invited to the debate, and the candidate from the ranks of the PSD filed a complaint with the Independent Media Commission (IMC). The IMC Executive Office found that the TV debate was

8 Krasniqi, A. (2025). *The Cost of Politics in Kosovo: Understanding Financial Barriers to Inclusive Political Participation*. Democracy Plus.

9 Personal interview with a parliamentary candidate. November, 2025, Prishtinë.

10 Musine Kokolari. (2022). *Who Cares? Unpaid Care Work in Kosovo*. Policy Analysis.

11 Personal interview with a parliamentary candidate. November, 2025.

12 FOL Movement. (2025). *Preliminary Media Monitoring Report - 2025 Local Elections*. Monitoring Report.

conducted in violation of Article 5, paragraph 2, and Article 12, paragraph 2 of IMC Regulation-2024/03 on the obligations of media service providers during the electoral campaign.¹³ However, due to the lack of a quorum within the IMC, so far it has not been possible to issue a final decision.

The situation becomes even more worrying when one looks at the participation of women in TV shows during the electoral campaign, especially in the role of analysts. Out of a total of 456 analyst appearances during the campaign, 413 were men (more than 90%), while only 43 were women (close to 10%).¹⁴ Although there is a general perception that these TV shows feature primarily male-dominated discourses and objectively unqualified talking heads, thus failing to gain the confidence and respect of analytical viewers, the lack of female participation remains a visible and worrying problem.

This lack of representation of women in decision-making networks and in public media has direct consequences for the development of women's political profiles. When women don't appear in debates or participate as analysts on TV shows, they miss out on the opportunity to build public visibility, credibility, and political authority. This, in turn, limits their further participation in politics, reduces their chances of positioning themselves on favorable electoral lists, and puts them in greater disadvantage compared to male candidates, deepening gender inequalities in decision-making and political participation.

13 This was announced by the candidate Mrs. Shahini, on her social media. For more, see: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1367264168091677&set=a.474143850737051>

14 FOL Movement. (2025). *Preliminary Media Monitoring Report - 2025 Local Elections*. Monitoring Report.

Gender Representation at Central Level

After addressing some of the main challenges related to women's participation in politics and their actual representation in political structures, beyond the gender quota, this section focuses on the analysis of women's representation in Government. Specifically, the level of representation in the positions of Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Ministers and Deputy Ministers is examined.

Actual representation of women in politics is essential, as participation at central levels of decision-making enables women to build stronger public profiles and increases their political influence to drive concrete change. However, despite the im-

portance of actual representation of women at the highest levels of decision-making and the existing legal framework that guarantees such equality,¹⁵ the institutional reality in the Government of Kosovo shows a clear discrepancy between the legal norm and actual practice.

So far, there has been no female Prime Minister in Kosovo's history. Since declaring independence in 2008, the country has been led exclusively by male Prime Ministers. The table below presents the gender composition at Deputy Minister level of the Kurti II (2021–2025), Hoti (2020–2021), Kurti I (2020), and Haradinaj (2017–2020) governments.

Government	Number of Deputy Prime Ministers	Women 	Men 
Kurti 2	3	2 	1
Hoti	4	1 	3
Kurti 1	2	0 	2
Haradinaj	5	0 	5

Table 1: Gender composition at Deputy Prime Minister level

15 Republic of Kosovo. (2015). Law No. 05/L-020 on Gender Equality. Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo.

Beyond the Gender Quota:

Kurti II has had 3 Deputy Prime Ministers, 2 of whom are women, and this shows a greater effort to include women in senior government positions independently of coalitions.

The Hoti government had 4 Deputy Prime Ministers, of which only 1 woman. Being a broad coalition, among other things, this affected the reduction of women's representation at this level.

Kurti I had 2 Deputy Prime Ministers, none of whom a woman. The government was part of a coalition, indicating that gender participation can be more difficult to guarantee when positions are allocated according to coalition agreements.

The Haradinaj government had 5 Deputy Prime Ministers, none of whom a woman. Its composition as a broad coalition led to a lack of gender representation at this level, suggesting that multiple-party coalitions may limit opportunities for women to be appointed to senior positions due to the political allocation of positions between parties.

One of the factors leading to higher gender participation at Deputy Prime Minister level appears to be related to the absence of wide coalitions when establishing the government. The wider the coalition a government needs to rise to power, the lower is

women's representation at this level. This reflects a phenomenon whereby political agreements between parties often reduce the opportunities for women to be included in key government positions.

One of the factors that explains the higher gender participation at the Deputy Prime Minister level is the fact that governments without coalitions have tended to include more women. The wider the coalitions a government needs, the lower is women's representation, reflecting the phenomenon whereby cross-party political agreements often reduce the opportunities for women's inclusion in key government positions, in addition to other challenges elaborated in the sections above.

In addition to coalitions, gender representation at Deputy Prime Minister level also depends on the political will of the party leader. LVV has shown this clearly, promoting women's participation in the campaign and reflecting this commitment in the composition of the Kurti II government. This shows that, in addition to the limitations of coalitions, the will of the leader has a direct impact on gender equality in key government positions.

Below, we analyze the gender representation at Minister level in four governments, during the 2017-2025 period.

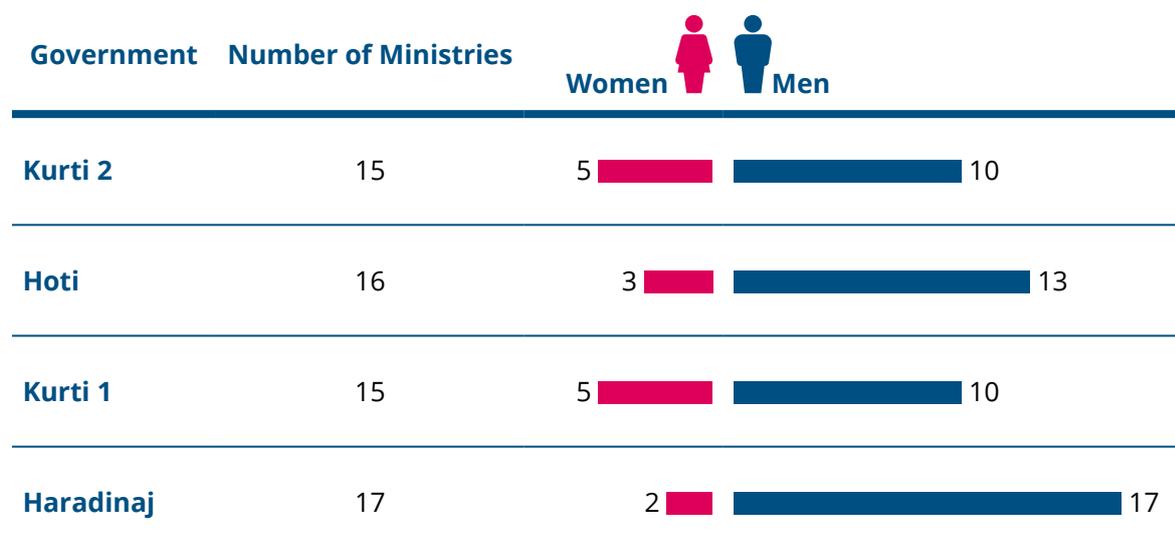


Table. 2: Gender composition at ministry level

As can be seen in the table above, in the Kurti II government (2021–2025), out of a total of 15 ministries, 5 were led by women and 10 by men. This yields a representation of about 33% for women at Minister level, showing a greater commitment to gender equality compared to previous governments. This level of participation shows a visible commitment to women's inclusion in key executive positions, regardless of possible political agreements.

The Hoti government (2020–2021) had 16 ministries, of which only 3 were led by women and 13 by men. The percentage of women in this government was about 19%, significantly lower than in the Kurti II government. This government was built on a broad coalition, and the drop in gender participation may be linked to the political allocation of positions between parties, which often limits opportunities for women in senior positions.

In the Kurti I government (2020), out of a total of 15 ministries, 5 were led by women and 10 by men, repeating the representation of 33% for women, as recorded later in the Kurti II government as well.

This shows that even in a government that had coalition challenges, LVV leadership paid attention to the participation of women in the cabinet.

Meanwhile, the Haradinaj government (2017–2020) had 17 ministries, of which only 2 were led by women and 15 by men, and gender representation was only about 12%. This reflects the lack of focus on gender equality and the influence of multi-party coalitions in limiting women's inclusion in key government positions.

At Minister level, gender participation appears to be higher when the government is led by a single party with a political will for equality, as seen in the Kurti I and II governments. Broad coalitions, such as in the Hoti and Haradinaj governments, often result in reduced women's representation, as the allocation of positions between parties can reduce the chances of appointing women as Ministers.

Further, we analyze the gender representation at Deputy Minister level across the four governments (2017-2025).

Viti	Qeveria	Gjithsej numri i zëvendësministrave		Gra	Burra
2021-2025	Kurti 2	21		4	17
2020-2021	Hoti	49		7	42
2017-2020	Haradinaj	70	65		5

Table 3: Composition of government at Deputy Minister level by gender¹⁶

16 Data on Deputy Ministers in the Kurti I government, which had a short-lived mandate, are incomplete, because the appointment process had not been completed by the time the government was overthrown by the coalition's smaller partner, LDK, although the governing coalition had agreed in advance that the government structure would include about 35 Deputy Ministers.

Beyond the Gender Quota:

Kurti II (2021–2025) had 21 Deputy Ministers, of whom 4 were women and 17 were men. The percentage of women is around 19%, which indicates a relatively low participation of women at this level, although higher than in governments with large coalitions, as seen below.

Hoti (2020–2021) had 49 Deputy Ministers, of whom only 7 were women and 42 were men. The percentage of women's participation is about 14% – rather low. This government was built on a relatively broad coalition, and the drop in gender participation may be related to the allocation of positions between parties, which often limits opportunities for women to be appointed to key positions.

Haradinaj (2017–2020) had 70 Deputy Ministers, of whom only 5 were women and 65 were men. The percentage of women was around 7%, very low, reflecting the impact of a broad coalition and lack of focus on gender equality.

In conclusion, gender representation at Deputy Minister level remains significantly lower compared to Minister level. Governments led by parties that have integrated social equality and women's inclusion in their political agenda and program (as in the case of the Kurti II Government) tend to include a larger number of women in executive positions. In contrast, governments formed by broad coalitions (such as the Hoti and Haradinaj governments) often limit opportunities for women's representation in key positions, although these governments have had a significantly larger number of Deputy Minister positions. Data from the last three government cabinets show that, even in the presence of a legal framework for gender equality, the actual inclusion of women in decision-making positions remains largely dependent on the political priorities of the leadership and on cross-party agreements.

This situation implies that, beyond the formal fulfillment of gender quotas, women continue to remain excluded from actual decision-making positions at the local level. The pronounced under-representation of women in municipal directorates and their complete absence in municipalities such as Klina and Novobërda, shows that the gender quota is not translating into equal access to power and institutional influence.

In this context, gender representation remains largely numerical and symbolic, while leadership structures continue to be dominated by men. This means that women, even when they are present in institutions through legal mechanisms, rarely manage to advance to key positions where strategic decisions are made, such as running municipal directorates. As a result, women's perspectives and needs risk remaining insufficiently reflected in local public policies and in the allocation of resources at the local level.

Gender Representation at Local Level

In the 2021 elections, as in those of 2025, women's representation among the candidates was significantly lower compared to men. In general, the number of female candidates was many times smaller than that of men. Specifically, in the 2021 elections, a total of 14 women and 153 men ran for mayor, while in the 2025 elections, the number of women candidates was 21, compared to 184 men.

Moreover, none of the women candidates in these two election cycles have managed to win the race. These data prove a pronounced gender inequality that starts from the candidacy stage, reflecting structural barriers within political parties and social customs, as discussed in the section above, and directly affecting women's representation in political leadership positions.

Year	Total candidates	Women	Men
2025	205	21	184
2021	167	14	153

Table 4: Number of mayoral candidates by gender

Source: Central Election Commission

These data prove a pronounced gender inequality that starts from the candidacy stage, reflecting structural barriers within political parties and social customs, as discussed in the section above, and directly affecting women's representation in political leadership positions.

Also, if we analyze the ten candidates who received the highest number of votes in the last local elections, it is observed that not a single one of them is a woman.¹⁷ In contrast, the situation at the central level is different, as in the 2021 and 2025 elections women were represented among the top ten candidates receiving the most votes: in 2021 there were three women, while in 2025 there were four women, of which one was the most voted candidate.

In addition, the table below shows political party lists for parliamentary candidates of the Assembly of Kosovo in February 2025, where it can be seen that each party has over 35% women on their lists. This shows a relatively good commitment to gender representation in candidate lists, but women's participation still does not reach an equal level with men's, showing that in practice structural inequalities and challenges to ensure balanced gender representation in the political process, are persistent.

Political Parties	Total number of candidates	Women candidates	Male candidates
Across all municipalities	5302	1964	3338
LVV	903	341	562
PDK	875	326	549
LDK	836	302	534
AAK	644	228	416
Srpska Lista	237	96	141

Table 5: Municipal assembly candidates at the local level, by gender

Burimi: Komisioni Qendror i Zgjedhjeve

17 Telegrafi. (2025, 18 tetor). *Local elections- these are 10 most votes assembly members in Kosovo*.Telegrafi.com. Accessible: <https://telegrafi.com/zgjedhjet-lokale-keta-jane-10-asamblistet-me-te-votuar-ne-kosove/>

A particularly important element of gender representation is related to the participation of women at municipal directorate level, which are executive positions directly appointed by decision of the mayor. Below is presented the data on gender representation in such positions at municipal level in the 2021 elections, while those of 2025 have not yet been finalized by the mayors at the time of writing.

Out of the 32 municipalities for which data is available, there are significant differences between municipalities in terms of gender representation in the leadership of municipal directorates.¹⁸ Some municipalities exhibit a relatively more balanced level of representation, while others lag significantly behind the minimum standards of gender equality.

Municipalities that are closer to gender equality representation or where women have a higher representation, include Hani i Elezit (5 women and 4 men), Podujeva (5 women and 5 men), Mitrovica North (5 women and 3 men), Peja (6 women and 8 men), Shtime (5 women and 6 men), Kamenica (5 women and 6 men), as well as Glllogovc (5 women and 7 men). These cases show that more balanced representation is possible, but remains limited to a small number of municipalities.

On the other hand, a deep gender disproportion is also observed in Dragash (7 men and 1 woman), Gracanica (8 men and 1 woman), Skënderaj (9 men and 1 woman), Prizren (11 men and 2 women), Istog (10 men and 2 women), Vushtrri (11 men and 2 women) and Fushë Kosova (9 men and 2 women). Whereas municipalities such as Klina and Novobërda do not have any women appointed to the position of director.

18 This data is extracted from the websites of the municipalities during the November 24 – December 4, 2025 period.

Representation in Party Structures

Data on gender representation in leadership structures of political parties clearly shows that gender inequalities are pronounced at the internal levels of party organization, directly affecting women's opportunities for political advancement and appointment to executive positions. Presidencies and steering councils constitute the key bodies where

strategic decisions are made, including the selection of candidates, allocation of positions and the shaping of political agendas, and the lack of balanced gender representation in these structures is then reflected in public institutions. As can be seen in the table below, women are under-represented in party presidency bodies.

Composition of party presidencies

Political Party	Women	Men	Total
PDK	15	29	44
LDK	11	30	41
AAK	11	27	38

Table 6: Composition of party presidencies

However, based on the information available from the website, out of a total of 35 branches of LVV across Kosovo, only three of them are run by women. This fact implies a significantly lower representation of women in leadership positions within local party structures, suggesting that, despite women's participation in the party, their access to decision-making roles remains limited.

In the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), out of a total of 44 members of the Party's Presidency, only 15 are women, while 29 are men, which translates to about 34% representation of women.¹⁹ Representation becomes even lower in the Steering Council, where out of a total of 179 members, only 49 are women, compared to 130 men, or about 27% women.²⁰ This shows that the higher and broader the decision-making body, the deeper the gender inequality becomes.

A similar situation is observed in the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK). In the Party's Presidency, women are only 11 out of 41 members, or about 27%, while in the Steering/General Council women's representation drops to about 26%, with 36 women out of a total of 138 members.²¹ This data shows a consistent lack of gender-balanced representation at both key levels of party decision-making.

Even in the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK), gender representation in the Party's Presidency remains limited. Out of a total of 38 members, only 11 are women, while 27 are men, which translates to about 29% representation of women.²² Meanwhile, there is no data on the party's website about the steering council.

At the time this analysis is being prepared, LVV's website has been transformed into an information platform on the program and candidates, which makes it impossible to access data on the number of members of the Steering Council.²³ However, based on the information available from the website, out of a total of 35 branches of LVV across Kosovo, only three of them are run by women. This fact implies a significantly lower representation of women in leadership positions within local party structures, suggesting that, despite women's participation in the party, their access to decision-making roles remains limited.

Overall, the data shows that none of the main parties have achieved equal gender representation in their leadership structures. Women remain under-represented, especially in the bodies with the greatest political influence, which confirms that the problem of gender representation does not start in elections or executive appointments, but is produced and reproduced within the political parties themselves. This structural under-representation limits women's access to decision-making networks, reduces their likelihood of running for favorable positions, and directly affects the absence of women in leadership positions at the central and local levels.

The importance of party branches constitute the first point of political power on the ground, where key decisions are made for electoral mobilization, selection of local candidates and building political careers. Branch leadership enables women to build political authority, support networks, and public visibility, which are prerequisites for running for higher positions, such as mayors, MPs, or Ministers. The huge shortage of women at the head of party branches shows that, even when women are numerically included in the party, they often remain excluded from the levels where actual political influence is exercised.

Consequently, the lack of representation of women in the leadership of party branches reflects structural and cultural barriers within parties, which limit the advancement of women and reproduce gender inequalities at all levels of political decision-making, from the local to the central level.

19 Democratic Party of Kosovo. (2026). Presidency. PDK.info. Accessible: <https://pdk.info/kryesia>

20 Democratic Party of Kosovo. (2025, June 21). Steering Council. PDK.info. Accessible: <https://pdk.info/keshilli-drejtues>

21 Democratic League of Kosovo (n.d.). Presidency and Steering Council. Accessible: <https://lidhjademokratike.org/kryesia-2/>; <https://lidhjademokratike.org/keshilli/>

22 Telegrafi. (2022, 29 June). *This is the new presidency of AAK*. Accessible: <https://telegrafi.com/kjo-eshte-kryesia-e-re-e-aak-se/>

23 The data was also requested via email from all political parties, but we did not receive any response.

Policy Recommendations

Gender representation in Kosovo continues to face significant challenges, despite legal quotas aimed at gender equality in institutions. Women in politics face structural, cultural, financial, and digital barriers that limit their opportunities to run, represent, and exert real influence on decision-making.

A particularly worrying problem is online gender-based violence, which includes threats, slander, insults and attacks on social media. These attacks, often carried out by men, are intended to discredit women's personal and professional careers, creating an atmosphere of fear that weakens self-confidence, security, and motivation for public engagement. Statistics show that such violence is increasing and has a deeply gendered character, aiming not only at denigrating women, but also at discouraging their participation in politics.

Financial challenges are another significant obstacle. Political engagement requires significant resources for campaigns, advertising, and public activities. Many candidates, especially women, are forced to use personal savings, family support, or bank loans, while support networks and access to male-dominated media and business networks are more limited for them. This creates a clear disparity in the opportunity to compete on a level playing field.

The burdens of unpaid jobs and family responsibilities pose an additional obstacle for women in politics. Childcare, housework, and caring for relatives limit their time, energy, and flexibility for public engagement. Studies show that women spend about 44% more time than men performing these obligations, reducing their opportunities for active participation and advancement in political careers.

The lack of access to political and media networks hinders the construction of women's public profile and political authority. Party structures and decision-making often take place in informal male-dom-

inated spaces, while public media and election debates are dominated by men. During the 2025 elections, for example, 92% of debaters at the national level were men and only 8% women, while women's participation as analysts was close to 10%. This lack of visibility reduces women's credibility and public authority and limits their chances of favorable positions on electoral lists.

At the central level, women's participation in decision-making positions remains low and influenced by coalition political agreements. Governments led by a single party, such as the Kurti II Government, achieved higher percentages of women's representation (33% of Ministers were women), while coalition governments, such as those of Hoti and Haradinaj, had much lower levels (only 12% of Ministers were women). At Deputy Prime Minister and Deputy Minister level, the percentages ranged from 7% to 67%, reflecting the impact of cross-party agreements on gender inclusion.

At the local level, challenges continue to be pronounced. The number of female candidates was significantly lower than that of men in the 2021 and 2025 municipal elections, and no woman won any mayoral race. The most balanced representation is found only in some municipalities, while others have no women in leadership positions.

In political parties, the under-representation of women in key decision-making bodies limits the building of political networks, public authority and opportunities for running for high office. For example, in the PDK, LDK and AAK, women make up only 27–34% of party presidencies, while in the LVV only 3 out of 35 branches are led by women.

In conclusion, the barriers to women's participation in politics are multidimensional and intertwined: online violence, financial barriers, burdens of unpaid work, lack of access to political and media networks, as well as decision-making constraints

at the central and local levels. To guarantee actual and equal gender representation, sustainable institutional interventions, changes in party structures, protection mechanisms against digital violence, and policies that facilitate balancing public engagement with family responsibilities, are required.

In this context, D+ recommends:

- Ensuring the full implementation of the Law on Gender Equality in all decision-making positions, including, but not limited to, the positions of Ministers, Deputy Ministers, municipal directors, as well as in the leadership structures of political parties, including party councils and presidencies.
- Political parties should adopt binding internal rules that guarantee equal gender representation in their decision-making bodies, at central and local level, including branches and steering forums.
- Establishing special public mechanisms and funds for financial support to women candidates, especially during electoral campaigns, in order to reduce structural inequalities in access to financial resources.
- Strengthening the legal and institutional framework for preventing and punishing gender-based digital violence, including misogynistic language, threats, slander and disinformation against women in politics.
- Political parties should adopt and implement binding codes of ethics that expressly prohibit the use of sexist and misogynistic language by their members, candidates and public representatives, with clear disciplinary measures in case of violation.
- The Independent Media Commission should systematically monitor gender representation in electoral debates and political TV shows, applying effective sanctions to media that violate the principles of gender equality and balance.
- Developing structured mentoring programs for women within political parties and public institutions, with a focus on building political careers and access to leadership positions.
- Investing in building women's professional and political capacities for executive positions, through continuous training in leadership, political management, decision-making and public communication.

