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WOMEN'S INCLUSION IN ELECTION MANAGEMENT BODIES IN KOSOVO



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Women's Inclusion in Election Management Bodies in Kosovo

Qualitative Analysis of the Low Proportion of Women in Election Field Positions

December 2015



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Acronym Table

AAK	Aleanca Per Ardhmerine e Kosoves
AKR	Aleanca Kosova e Re
BSDAK	Bosnjacka Stranka Demokratske Akcije Kosova
CEC	Central Election Commission
CRC	Count and Result Centre
CSO	Civil Society Organization
D4D	Democracy for Development
EMB	Election Management Body
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
KDTP	Kosova Demokratik Turk Partisi
LDK	Lidhja Demokratike e Kosoves
LVV	Levizja Vetevendosje
MEC	Municipal Election Commission
MEO	Municipal Election Officer
NISMA	Nisma per Kosoven
PDK	Partia Demokratike e Kosoves
PSC	Polling Station Commission
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Introduction

In recent years, there has been some progress in the participation of women in public life in Kosovo. Aside from more women in leadership positions such as school directors or in political entity branches, in the 2013 municipal elections the first woman Mayor was elected, and in the 2014 national elections, 20 out of 39 women Members of Parliament were elected without needing the support of the gender quota. However, progress is uneven and slow in some electoral areas. While the Law on General Elections contains gender quotas for election candidates and elected representatives, it does not specifically require that a minimum proportion of election staff positions be filled by women. There are no sanctions applied to political entities who nominate no or very few women to election staff positions, and consequently, while the situation is gradually improving, the proportion of election staff who were women during the 2014 elections was only 20 percent, with a much lower proportion of women in management positions at the municipal and polling station level. The current Law on Gender Equality requires public institutions to achieve employment parity between men and women.

This report is based on qualitative research conducted by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) in 2015 in an attempt to identify common barriers to the employment of women as election staff and potential measures that could be implemented to overcome these barriers.

Background

The extent of inclusion of women in election staff is a significant indicator of the level of participation of women in electoral and political processes, and ultimately in decision-making. In Kosovo, there is no quota in the election law or regulations that determine the minimum level of inclusion of women in election staff. In February 2015, IFES published a quantitative analysis of election staffing by gender in Kosovo, which showed that women were employed in 20 percent of municipal and polling station level election positions for the 2014 national elections. This represents a slight increase compared to the 2013 municipal elections, where the percentage of women employed in these positions was 17 percent.

The gender analysis showed that the proportion of women in field level election management positions is significantly lower than that of the overall proportion of women in election staff. In the 2014 national elections, only 11 percent of Municipal Election Officers (MEOs), 13 percent of Municipal Election Commission (MEC) members, and 13 percent of Polling Station Commission (PSC) Chairs were women. The proportion of women in PSC reserve staff, however, was considerably higher, at 31 percent.

In Kosovo, staff for these positions are nominated directly by political entities. Gender equality among people nominated for election field positions is a challenge for political entities. Women comprise a very low proportion of the election staff nominated by the two largest political entities, *Partia Demokratike e Kosovës* (PDK) and *Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* (LDK), at 13 percent and 11 percent respectively. The situation is a little better in other Albanian community-based political entities: such as *Aleanca e Ardhmërisë së Kosovës* (AAK), *Nisma për Kosovën* (NISMA), *Lëvizja Vetëvendosje* (LVV), and *Aleanca Kosova e Re* (AKR), which in the 2014 national elections nominated among their election staff 18 percent,

23 percent, 24 percent, and 28 percent women, respectively. Some minority community-based political entities, however, nominated higher proportions of women among their election staff positions in the last elections, for example *Kosova Demokratik Turk Partisi* (KDTP) and *Bosnjacka Stranka Demokratske Akcije Kosova* (BSDAK) with 33 percent and 35 percent respectively. These percentages, although still considerably lower than the 50 percent required for gender equality, show that it is possible for political entities to nominate higher proportions of women among their election staff.

The proportion of election staff who are women varies significantly between municipalities. In the 2014 elections, it was high in the northern municipalities Zvečan (38 percent), Zubin Potok (41 percent), and Mitrovica North (41 percent), and in other municipalities such as Prishtina (35 percent). There are some municipalities, on the other hand, with very low representation of women among election staff, including Dragash (6 percent), Shtërpce (8 percent), Malisheve (9 percent), Novobërde (9 percent), and Kamenice (11 percent).

Methodology

The information for this report was collected through seven focus groups, 31 meetings with political entity representatives at the local and central level, and four workshops with Central Election Commission (CEC) representatives and other stakeholders. Through these activities, the perspectives of both men and women from majority and minority communities on participation of women in election staffing were explored.

The seven focus groups, with a total of 67 participants, were held in Gjakova, Istog, Lipjan, Malisheve, Mitrovica North, Peja, and Rahovec, during April and May 2015. The participants included members of political entities, election staff, and persons who have not been engaged in elections. Meetings were organized at the municipal level (18 meetings) and central level (13 meetings), between May and July 2015. A total of 301 participants attended these meetings, the vast majority of whom were political entity representatives, with some participants from civil society. In addition to these activities, there were four workshops with CEC representatives and other electoral stakeholders that took place in March, April, and June 2015.

In each of these events there was a discussion about the barriers that lead to under-representation of women in election staff and about the potential measures that could be taken by stakeholders to address these barriers. Each barrier identified in focus groups, meetings, and workshops was recorded, and from this information a list of 37 barriers that directly or indirectly influence the level of inclusion of women in electoral management bodies (EMBs) was compiled. These barriers were then grouped in the following categories:

1. Societal attitudes towards women (24 barriers);
2. Concerns about the consequences of being election staff (seven barriers); and
3. Political will (six barriers).

The barriers within these categories were then merged into sub-groups based on patterns and similarities. All barriers, most of which are perception based, were treated with equal weight, as they each reveal one component of the issue. Given that informants' perceptions indicate that some barriers are more likely to be present in one geographical area, and less likely in another, the weight of each barrier in the overall issue of women's participation in election staffing cannot be clearly defined.

Findings

Exposure to IFES' research during meetings and focus groups was for most participants the first time they had considered the issue of women's participation in electoral management. Generally, there was a skewed perception about the proportion of women employed in EMBs at municipal and polling station levels, with the general perception being that it is at least 40 percent, or even that gender balance had been achieved. This perception was found among women as well as men, and was often based on having seen women working in a polling station, or having worked with women in a polling station, and assuming that staffing in all polling stations was similar. Reinforcing this misconception in some locations was a predominant belief that elections and politics are solely for men, so seeing even a very few women election staff was more than was expected.

This to some extent explains why, prior to IFES' quantitative analysis of gender in election staffing for the 2013 and 2014 elections, the low proportion of women among election staff had not been raised as an issue requiring attention. IFES' quantitative analysis, combined with discussions at the meetings, workshops and focus groups described above resulted in participants identifying that the low proportion of election staff who are women is a problem for effective electoral management.

Most of the 37 barriers to women's participation as election staff were mentioned by participants from all municipalities. However, views on the extent and the impact of a barrier often were perceived as very different between municipalities. This was particularly the case when comparing the views of participants from highly urbanized municipalities compared to those from more rural municipalities. Generally, in urban areas women have more opportunities for employment, including the opportunity to be nominated or directly selected to work as election staff. The barriers identified during this research, and their impact on the employment of women as election staff, are discussed below.

Category of Barrier: Societal attitudes towards women

Most of the barriers identified through this research are a result of societal attitudes toward women that either question the ability of women to successfully perform in election staff positions, particularly under the pressure of elections, or perceive that women should give higher priority to other responsibilities.

Care-giver responsibilities as women's main priority

In the Kosovo culture and tradition, women are considered a pillar of the household, whose main responsibilities include taking care of the family and the home. In some areas, this is the main responsibility of women, and as such, has priority over any other responsibility. This raises issues when it comes to them potentially being employed as election staff, given the long hours of service required in most election staff positions. In positions such as PSC Chairs, work hours commence at 5:00 a.m. and can continue until 1:00 a.m. the next day, depending on how long it takes to complete the ballot count and the ballot box is sealed and sent to the Municipal Election Office for transfer to the Count and Results Center (CRC). Most participants in this research found this schedule to be problematic, as in order to be employed as election staff, women would have to forego the family and household commitments they have for the day. This is seen as particularly challenging for women who have young children.

“It seems that women’s participation in public life is possible to some extent. Until a certain level, women can be very successful. Anything that comes higher than that, say some more advanced political engagement or shooting for any higher position, requires huge sacrifices for women. Either to give up family obligations or in some other way to sacrifice something, an action that will be characterized negatively by the population at large is characterized as negative. And then women do not want to follow such a path.”

– Unemployed 29-year-old woman

In addition to working on Election Day, anyone employed as election staff is required to attend a one or two-day training workshop, depending on the position. For some women, this means that they have to forego family and household commitments for this additional period. Discussions at the focus groups, meetings and workshops indicated that traditional gender roles within many families in Kosovo can make it difficult for women to delegate their family and household commitments to other members, especially men. If such delegation is not an option, being employed as election staff will not be either.

None of the women who participated in these IFES-supported discussions indicated that they would forego an opportunity to work as election staff because of the long hours and availability commitment required. However, in these same discussions this was constantly raised as a barrier by EMB and political entity representatives, who were mostly men. These are the people responsible for nominating and employing election staff, and their attitude that women's family care role is more important than a work opportunity made them reluctant to propose or lobby for women's appointment to election staff positions.

Some male political entity representatives indicated that they had nominated some women for election staff positions, but that they had not been reliable, withdrawing from the position on very short notice, with an assumption then made that this was often related to the women's obligations at home. This fed a general belief among these political entity representatives that women were not reliable election staff. These political entity representatives acknowledged that there are cases of men who have withdrawn

from election staff positions at very short notice, however, potential reasons for this were not associated with their gender.

In summary, these discussions indicated that the situation of women as family caretakers has two dimensions in relation to employment as election staff: 1) some women do not consider that they will be able to take the time away from their family obligations for election staff duties, and 2) men in a position of power to nominate election staff (and some women) may have an attitude that family obligations are more important for women than employment, and may use this reasoning to nominate men rather than women to election staff positions.

Dependency on the family and the community

In some locations, particularly in rural areas, access to transportation may be a significant barrier for women to be employed as election staff. Few women in these areas have their own vehicle or access to drive one, and public transport services are poor – particularly in relation to election staff's hours of work. Obtaining transport home at the end of work on polling day was seen as particularly challenging, as this will be very late at night. In order to successfully carry out their duties as election staff women generally depend on their family or friends for transport to the polling center or other election-related locations. According to some participants, if the relevant EMB or political entity could facilitate this transport more women would feel able to work as election staff.

Aside from dependency for transportation, these discussions indicated that some women must obtain permission from their family members to be employed as election staff, and according to some participants, families may not grant women this permission. Participants in these discussions indicated that there are multiple reasons this permission may not be granted. These reasons include security concerns and belief that election work is not a job for women. Some participants noted that jealousy can also be a reason why a family does not permit a woman to be employed as election staff: it may be due to a jealous spouse, or to concerns about local gossip, if a woman spends all day and night in a polling station with other men. While such instances appear to be few, participants were sure that they are present, particularly in more rural areas, and as such are a major barrier to women's participation as election staff.

"I served in a polling center in a rural village of Lipjan, where I was mostly holding the UV light to check if people had voted before. There, I was advised to be cautious of the way I checked the hands of women, as I should not touch them at any point."

–Male Polling Station Worker

In such cases, even if there were political will to employ more women, this would be a challenge due to these societal attitudes. Participants consider that it takes time to overcome traditional gender roles, but the increased number of women in educational institutions and in the work force has been leading to changes. Some participants maintained that political entities and state institutions, like the CEC, can serve as models and inspire changes. If these stakeholders reinforce the significance of inclusion of women in decision-making, electoral processes, and public life overall, the message will be gradually accepted, and

families will also accept and even encourage their women family members to be more active. However, these participants consider that stakeholders need to show their commitment to gender equality through their actions, not only rhetoric, for the message to have effect in influencing traditional gender roles.

Inability to carry out the tasks of election staff

In most of the discussions that took place at the focus groups, meetings and workshops, women were not treated as individuals with different abilities and characteristics, but as a group. There were often perceptions that all women, as a group, could or could not do something. Many times these perceptions did not reflect reality, but they were real to the people who believed them to be true, and as such formed the basis for those in a position to nominate more women as election staff not to do so.

One of the perceptions, mostly raised by male participants, was that women could not carry heavy items, and, in particular, they could not carry a ballot box containing ballots. This is a requirement for PSC Chairs when returning materials at the close of counting in a polling station. According to these participants, women would have to ask a male PSC member to carry the ballot box, with a strong inference that since women could not fulfill all the required duties, they should not be employed.

Women's ability to deal with pressure was also questioned by some participants. They consider that women do not have the courage and are too emotional to deal with psychological or other pressures from sources such as political party activists. In addition, some believe that women are not persistent enough, and should there be cases where they need to stand up for the integrity of the election or the legitimate interest of the political entity that has nominated them, they would not be able to do it.

Another perception raised by some participants was the belief that women are too fragile to be put at risk of being involved as election staff. These participants maintained that if there is a situation of pressure, threats or potential violence toward male election staff, it would be taken care of immediately, even if through the use of physical force. However, if a woman was in a similar position, this issue would become more serious and could lead to future hostilities between the woman's family and the family of the person alleged to have threatened her. Such cases were believed by participants to be rare, but this perception appears to be sufficient to create the impression among some political entity representatives that nominating women to election staff positions entails more risks.

Some participants in these discussions questioned whether women hold sufficient educational qualifications to be election staff. For most election staff positions, the minimum educational standard required is a secondary school degree, and the number of young women pursuing higher education is currently higher than that of young men. However there is still a perception among some participants, that women have lesser qualifications and experience for election staff positions than men.

These perceptions result in some men and even women who have the authority to nominate election staff being unwilling to increase the numbers of women that they nominate. On the other hand, it also creates

a challenge for those women who want to serve as election staff to prove themselves and show that they can carry out their duties as well as or better than men.

Politics is not for women

Many men and women participating in the discussions noted that in Kosovo there is a belief that elections and politics are fields that are the preserve of men. Men have more experience in these fields, and it is perceived that the performance of women who break into election staff positions is unfairly compared to that of men with extensive experience, reinforcing perceptions that women are not “good enough” for this work. At the discussion in Ferizaj, one woman noted that this belief is so predominant that even some women have come to believe it and think that a man in the same position will perform better in a specific task by default, and that due to this belief, some women do not even consider the option of being involved in elections or politics.

Those women who want to be involved as election staff and in politics believe that they face unequal competition. They believe that they face a patriarchal mentality that predetermines the roles of men and women, which is engraved in the mentality of political entities. They believe that this means that women have to continually prove themselves to be worthy of the positions they are in or want to be in, which is not expected of men.

Participants noted that there are circumstances that reinforce this mentality that tends to exclude women. For example, major political and election related decisions are often taken during discussions in coffee shops or restaurants, where women are usually not invited or where they do not feel comfortable to attend. Participants noted cases where the lists of people to be nominated for election staff are developed in such locations, with no input from women, so women miss out on opportunities.

“Our society is governed by some traditional values that do not provide women with enough opportunity to prove themselves. [...] Older generations seem to not understand that an educated woman means a healthier society. We keep hearing that women are inferior to men ... that we cannot perform as well. There is always a barrier for women to prove that they can make it. I was part of the election staff and I did my best to prove myself; I have seen many women that performed better than the men that were part of the election staff. I tried my best to give women an image that we are able to perform as well as men.”

—Employed 24-year-old Woman

Women can or cannot be manipulated?

Strongly opposed views were expressed when participants discussed whether women are more or less likely to be manipulated when carrying out their tasks as election staff. Some participants maintained that women are more likely to be subject to attempts at manipulation, and that women may not withstand pressure, such as from other PSC members. The concerns expressed were not that women would manipulate the election process but that they could be pressured not to speak up about manipulations carried out by others and to certify that voting and counting processes in a polling station had been correctly implemented when they had not been. Such false certification would risk prosecution.

On the other hand, there were numerous participants who maintained that women cannot be manipulated, and when women take on election staff responsibilities they are successful in ensuring that the voting and counting process is orderly and goes smoothly. Some male participants maintained that they would hesitate to ask a woman to commit any violations or manipulate the process. They would rather ask another man, or in their words a “buddy.” Some participants maintained that the perception that women are less likely to be manipulated is a reason why some political entities do not nominate more women as election staff, as they want to have the option of manipulating the process to obtain more votes if the opportunity presents itself.

“I have heard that women election staff were not very active during the elections. Men had an arrangement between themselves, so women were there just to do some technical procedures. [...] Men work better with men – they communicate more easily among each other. Even if they want to cheat, then they will have greater trust to discuss and cheat when they agree among themselves. Women are not so trustworthy.”

–Employed 31-year-old man

Women’s interest in working in elections

Some participants, mainly men, questioned whether women were interested in working as election staff. These included representatives of political entities who maintained that they try to engage more women as election staff but they have difficulties due to women’s lack of interest in being involved. They attributed this perceived lack of interest to factors such as women placing a higher priority on family engagements, perceptions that elections are a man’s job, and safety concerns.

Other participants viewed this differently, noting that there is not much space for women in political entity administrative structures, which are a major source from which these entities select their election staff. They noted that while political entities that have women’s forums maintain that these provide the opportunity for women to become engaged as active political entity members, these forums are not attractive to many women as they provide limited opportunities for personal and professional development and have little decision-making power. Some women participants had the perception that engagement in these forums, particularly at the branch level, means attending a series of dead end

meetings, so that many women decide that engagement with the political entity is not worth their time. Due to this perception, these women did not have any interest to join a political party. As a result, many parties face challenges in increasing membership of women or retaining women as activists from one election cycle to another. From the perspective of political entity representatives in these discussions, mostly male, this is seen as a lack of interest from women to participate in the entity's administration.

Participants in the focus groups identified two reasons to get engaged in electoral management: contribution to the country by getting engaged in processes as important as elections and remuneration. Some women participants particularly mentioned how important it is for them to contribute to orderly elections, which shows that they can be interested in electoral management, if provided with the opportunity. In addition to the opportunity to contribute, remuneration was also considered a significant motivator, particularly in the current economy.

Category of Barrier: Concerns about the consequences of being an election staff

Elections are not safe for women election staff

Views expressed during the discussions indicated that the violations and violent incidents during the 2010 general elections, and some threats and violence at other elections, have affected the perception that many people have about elections. Participants noted that to many people, elections are characterized by psychological pressure, threats, harassments, improper practices and even violence. The measures taken for the 2013 municipal elections and 2014 national elections have had an impact in changing this perception for some citizens, but others still have safety concerns. Some representatives of political entities stated that to deal with these security concerns and ensure that their votes are protected it is important to deploy male "muscles" as PSC members, who can apply pressure should the circumstances require this. This leads to a vicious cycle of imitation: if one political entity nominates "muscles" as election staff, others follow to protect their interests. This disadvantages women in being nominated as election staff, and can also lead to increased tension on Election Day.

Due to these safety concerns, many representatives of political entities expressed the view that it is not safe for women to work in municipal and polling station election commissions. They would rather nominate men, who are perceived as stronger and more capable of handling difficult situations. From the discussions it was evident that even when political parties would want to nominate more women election staff, they can face challenges from families discouraging or even not allowing their female family members to work as election staff due to safety concerns. For this reason, the contribution of all stakeholders for safe, orderly, and transparent elections, would address the

"I am a party member and I work in elections, but if my wife and daughters wanted to work on Election Day, I would not let them. There are risks in elections, and I wouldn't want them to face those risks."

*—Male political party representative
from Prishtina*

concerns of family members, who will then be more likely to allow their female family members to partake in elections as staff, observers, or even candidates.

In addition to possible tension, threats, and violence, some discussion participants noted that during the 2013 and 2014 elections there were concerns about collective responsibility of PSC members if violations of election law are found. There have been frequent public service announcements prior to these elections informing citizens about legal measures and consequences that they would face should they be involved in election violations. PSC members certify at the end of voting and counting that the process was implemented correctly. If irregularities are found at a polling station, all of its polling station commission members who certified the process may be prosecuted, whether or not they were actually involved in any violation.

Although both men and women participants expressed concern about this, it was perceived as more problematic and socially embarrassing if women were to find themselves in these circumstances. Some political entity representatives also believed that it is more likely for women to face such situations, as women could be more easily pressured into certifying the process and/or not reporting any violations. While other participants noted instances where women did not give in to such pressure, some still regarded women as wholly passive and obedient.

For this reason, the contribution of all stakeholders for safe, orderly, and transparent elections, would address the concerns of family members. It is particularly imperative that there is security in every polling station, and that the environment for the election staff employed there is free of any sort of harassment or threat. Therefore, while societal attitudes take time to change, political entities and EMBs could work on the front of ensuring safety for all election staff, which will have a direct impact on the number of women who would be willing, and in some cases allowed, to serve as election staff.

Association with political entities

Election staff are most commonly nominated by political entities. In order to be nominated, a person has to be part of the political entity circle, either through membership or association with members of the entity, and have their trust.

This generally means that individuals are identified as associated with that specific political entity, particularly in smaller communities where people know everyone and their links. Participants noted that this becomes problematic when there is a shift in power, and the political entity a person is associated with loses power. There was a strong perception that in these cases the political entity that is now in power will fire anyone who is associated with another political entity, and also their family members. In some focus groups and meetings there were participants who have faced losing their job because of this, or who knew people who are currently unemployed because of this.

While this perception may be a reason for both men and women not considering serving as election staff, participants considered this to be a greater barrier for women. Women, particularly in smaller communities, already have few employment opportunities outside “women’s role” sectors such as teaching and nursing, and their association with a specific political entity may jeopardize even those few opportunities. Some male political entity representatives maintained that while they face the same risks, it is easier for them, as they can travel and find jobs in other cities, which is not a realistic option for many women due to their family and household obligations.

“It is important also to be associated with a political party that has the means to stay in power for a longer period. One must be careful about that. For example, you are politically active, you manage to get employed, and then another party comes to the power and you lose everything.”

–Employed 28-year-old woman

Category of Barriers: Political will

Poor implementation of the law on gender equality

Kosovo’s election law and supporting regulations do not have a gender quota, or any other measures that seek to achieve gender representation in election staff. However, Kosovo does have a law on gender equality that requires state and public institutions to take measures that would ensure gender equality in their respective institution. Law Nr. 2004/2 on gender equality, adopted in July 2007, and in force for elections since then required all institutions to have a representation of at least 40 percent from each gender, per Article 2.12 and 3.2. This has clearly not been met in election staff, and participants noted that there appears to have been no political interest in enforcing it. An amended law on gender equality (Law Nr. 05/L-020) was adopted in June 2015, and requires equal representation of both genders in state and public institutions, including decision-making positions, as stipulated by Article 6.7 and 6.8. Article 14 of this law also requires political entities to take measure to promote gender equality in their structures, to ensure there is equal representation of both genders.

While the legal framework for gender equality is defined, participants in the discussions noted that its implementation remains a challenge as there is no monitoring of gender representation and no sanctions for the institutions and political entities who fail to uphold the requirements for representation of each gender. Under these circumstances, the law is not treated as mandatory, and there is no effort made by the state institutions or political entities to comply with it. The full implementation of the law on gender equality would become an affirmative measure that would ensure that women have equal opportunities to be employed as election staff.

Nominations for election staff cannot be controlled

Political entity branches generally receive nominations for election staff from their sub-branches. Each sub-branch nominates a specified number of trustworthy and influential persons, who will then serve as election staff for the polling stations in the area where the sub-branch is located. Sub-branches have

autonomy in this staff nomination process, and according to branch level political entity representatives who participated in these discussions, there isn't much that they can do to influence who the sub-branches nominate, and they cannot risk their relationship with the sub-branch by requesting them to include more women. They noted that a political entity's support depends heavily on the influence of its sub-branches, and thus maintaining a good relationship with sub-branches is a high priority. Until political entities have the will to enforce compliance with the law on gender equality or to implement other affirmative internal actions for women, this is not likely to change.

Women in EMBs: The perspective of CEC representatives

During the election process, the CEC works closely with political entities. The CEC's permanent Municipal Election Officers, as Chairs of MECs, have a close view of political entities' nomination processes for election staff, and directly supervise the election processes in which these staff are involved. The CEC also directly hires election staff for a number of roles both in the field and to provide support for the CEC's Secretariat. In these respects, the CEC is aware of the numbers of women election staff employed, and is familiar with the perceived barriers to employment of women as election staff. It also considers that its powers under election law do not allow it to direct or influence political entities to have gender balance in the people they nominate for election staff positions.

A group of CEC members, CEC Secretariat staff and MEOs provided their views on the barriers to women's employment as election staff that were identified by the focus groups and meetings with political entity representatives. The barriers within the category of political were regarded as the most significant to address. This was followed by those within the category of societal attitudes toward women. Barriers within the category of security were considered to be easier to remove, as they have been partially addressed by the measures taken to ensure safe and transparent processes during the past two elections.

These CEC representatives also considered which of the 37 identified barriers would be the hardest to overcome, with the following barriers being ranked overall as the most difficult:

1. Election working hours are too long for women;
2. Concerns about being associated with a political entity;
3. Lack of controls on political entities' nominations of election staff;
4. Psychological pressures on Election Day are difficult for women; and
5. Lack of sanctions for political entities that do not comply with the law on gender equality.

Benefits of including more women in election staff

Inclusion of women in electoral management goes beyond providing equal opportunities for both genders in order to ensure that human rights are fully respected. There are numerous benefits for election stakeholders, particularly political entities, who engage women in election staff. The benefits, described below, ranging from better internal performance to more votes for the political entity, and ultimately

more legitimate elections due to the higher turnout, can also be incentives for the nominating party to engage more women in these positions.

Inclusive electoral processes are more trustworthy

Election field staff positions have been predominantly filled by men, as they have generally been more politically active, and are therefore men are considered more capable for these positions. However, according to male participants in focus groups and municipal meetings who have had the opportunity to work with women, women can successfully carry out the tasks of their position as well. Furthermore, the vast majority of the participants who worked along with women in election staff maintained that women tend to be stricter in following the guidelines and are, thus, more trustworthy. They are considered to be more attentive to details and have a more pacifist attitude in difficult situations. When necessary, women have also taken measures to protect the process, and there have been cases where women PSC Chairs have closed the polling station temporarily until support has arrived, to ensure that there is no tampering with the process. Aside from the values and background that women bring to electoral processes, the inclusion of women in electoral management gives an image that electoral processes are inclusive, which in turns increases the perception of these processes being trustworthy.

“It’s more convenient for us to go and vote in a polling station where there are women election staff. You experience a sense of comfort; you enter the polling station without hesitation.”

– Half-time employed 39-year-old woman

There’s more comfort for specific groups when there are women in election staff

A polling station with men and women is not as intimidating as a polling station with men only, particularly for women voters. In fact, voting in a male dominated polling station is often perceived as uncomfortable, and can even be a disincentive for some women to go and vote. On the other hand, when there are women in polling stations, women as well as youth and elderly feel more comfortable to participate in the election process. Conservative families, who are generally more hesitant to allow their women family members to go and vote, will be more comfortable to do so when there are women election staff. Therefore, a gender diverse election staff increases the comfort of all groups, which leads to more women participating in the process.

A more inclusive election process can lead to a higher voter turnout

The inclusion of women in the election process can lead to a more comfortable environment and elections being perceived as more transparent, which can have a direct impact on the decision of perspective voters on whether to vote or not. The inclusion of women in election staff has a direct relationship with the number of women voters, and thus the increase of women employed in EMBs can lead to more women who vote, and an increase in the overall voter turnout. This in turn leads to more votes for political

entities, and can play a role in determining the seats that parties can attain from the process. Higher voter turnout also increases the legitimacy of the election process, and the leadership that is elected.

India is one of the examples where the increase of women in election management has led to a major increase in the voter turnout. There was a minimum of one woman per polling station to ensure that women feel more comfortable to vote. In addition, there was a motivational campaign targeted to encourage women to vote, women police officers were deployed throughout all polling centers to provide a sense of security for women, and separate queues were provided for women to facilitate faster voting. This has made the environment more comfortable for women, and has in turn led to increases in voter turnout.

Women make informed decisions

Employment in EMBs has an impact in the process of women's empowerment, as it gives women an opportunity to learn more about the electoral process and the significance of their votes. As a result, women can shift their attitudes toward the process and change from passive voters who cast votes for parties or candidates that do not represent any meaning for them to active citizens who make informed decisions about their votes. This has an impact in reducing family voting, like in the case of Macedonia, and increasing the turnout of women in Election Day, like in the case of India.

Increases the capacities of political entities in the long run

Through engaging women in electoral management, political entities can provide opportunities to women to learn about the electoral and political process as well as show their skills and abilities. This is not only an opportunity for women, but it is also an opportunity for political entities to create a pool of women candidates that they can engage in party structures as well as nominate either for election staff or candidates for members of local or national assembly. Thus, employment in election staff is a good segue for women to be engaged in political entities, which has benefits for both parties.

There are two target groups of women particularly where political entities can recruit from for electoral management. The first group includes young women, who are recent graduates. Recruiting young women for election staff positions provides political entities with an opportunity to inform these women on the party ideology and system, and then potentially recruit them as members. With the qualifications of these young women, their interest to gain experience, and some professional development provided by the

“Working as election staff has many benefits, especially for women. Women most often are not informed about the election process or political life. The more women get engaged in the election process, the more they get to know what the election is all about. It’s not as it is now: women go and vote for somebody that they are told to, without knowing why they are doing that. [...] Only when I got to work as an election staff, I got trained about the election process and started realizing important issues about the elections. I realized that the same path should be followed by many other women.”

– Employed 24-year-old woman

political entities, these women can even become assets of a political entity in terms of representation. In addition to recent graduates, political entities should consider women who work in occupations that are dominated by women, like teachers and nurses, for election staff positions and even members. These women have higher education and are constantly in contact with a large number of people. Generally, these women are treated with great respect in their communities, and they will not only encourage more people to vote, but their association with a specific political entity can also lead to more votes for the party.

Gender diverse teams lead to better performance and results

Renowned research in the private and public sector demonstrate that gender diverse groups, particularly in leadership roles, lead to better results. The presence of gender diversity in a group is one of the key factors that influences the group's collective "intelligence" and ability to make successful decisions. In the private sector, the return on investment in companies with gender diverse top management is about 30 percent higher compared to those with all male boards. The data from the public sector also indicates that gender diverse groups lead to better performance, particularly in knowledge and talent management, job satisfaction, and in creating a results oriented performance culture.

This applies to the internal performance of political entities, as well as the performance of EMBs.

Improves the internal and external image of the political entities

Gender balance in election staff and the political entity structure in general shows respect for equal rights and belief in the capacity of both men and women as change agents. For this reason, nominating more women in election staff and including more women in the party will improve the internal and external image of the political entity. In terms of internal image, political entities are more likely to earn the votes of women voters if they are perceived as a political entity that provides equal opportunities to both genders. Political entities that promote and function based on the principles of gender equality will also build a good image internationally, as they will be perceived as more democratic and respectful of human rights.

Positive changes in the electoral environment

Elections are perceived as more secure

The preparations for 2013 municipal elections and 2014 national elections included extensive security measures to ensure there is overall safety for people to vote and that there are no irregularities in the process. The public service announcements conveyed a clear message that anyone involved in any type of election violation will face legal consequences, and that had an impact on deterrence. The support of police forces as safeguards of the election process as well as the stand by attitude of the prosecutor's office contributed to the perception that elections were more secure. While there are still some that question the safety of women who are employed in election staff, there was an overall perception among

focus group participants that there are little or no security risks for women engaged in elections. This is a significant positive change that will contribute to tackling some of the barriers that lead to a low proportion of women in election staff.

More women are pursuing higher education

Participants attribute the increasing number of women employed in election staff to the increased number of women who pursue higher education. According to them, in the recent years, even in more distant rural settlements, the number of women who have achieved higher levels of education has increased. Higher involvement in institutional life, predominantly of young women attaining higher education levels, has increased the confidence among women to get engaged in processes that were historically predominantly occupied by men. As it was noted in focus group discussions, some regions of Kosovo have had a women school director only in the recent past, whereas some political parties have only recently elected women as branch Presidents. This positive change has led to even more qualified women candidates for different positions, and to some extent more competition within political entities, as there are no longer only pools of men to select from when it comes to nominating candidates for election staff or for members of local or national assemblies.

Declaration on the Inclusion of Women in Electoral Management

The advocacy efforts of IFES and Democracy for Development (D4D) in coordination with political entities at the central and municipal level have culminated with a “Declaration on the Inclusion of Women in Electoral Management,” through which political entities commit to taking various measures to ensure there is gender balance in the election staff that they nominate, in spirit with the Kosovo Law on Gender Equality. Specifically, signatory political entities commit to:

- Analyzing and evaluating gender representation within the political entity following each election to evaluate gender balance in the membership of the political entity;
- Nomination of women to all positions in election management bodies at a local, central, and polling station levels, to achieve a representation of at least 40 percent of each gender at a national level, until equal representation for both genders is achieved;
- Development of inclusive strategies and plans to increase participation of women in the electoral process and make these documents available for the public;
- Engagement of women in activities within party structures, in positions such as: campaign officials, election administrators, party agents and observers;
- Implementation of information and motivational campaigns for women voters; and
- Taking measures to include women with disabilities in all the above mentioned activities.

The declaration was signed on September 16, 2015 and, as of December 2015, 17 political entities have signed it.

Election Staff Management System

The information collected for election field staff until now did not contain information on gender, and thus any disaggregation of data based on gender has been challenging. As of October 2015, the CEC will have a new system of managing the temporary election staff, which will allow for data to be disaggregated by gender. The Election Staff Management System will enable the CEC to monitor the proportion of men and women employed directly (direct recruitment) and indirectly (nominations by political entities and other stakeholders) by the CEC. Through this system, the CEC will be able to inform political entities if the number of women they nominate is low and encourage them to nominate more women. In addition, if there are additional measures that the CEC would take in the future, like a gender quota for the election staff, this system will allow for easy monitoring of whether the quota is fulfilled.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the Central Election Commission:

1. Conduct a gender analysis to identify the gaps in gender inclusion in electoral management, and use this analysis as the basis of actions to achieve gender equality.
2. Develop a Gender Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan within the next twelve months in consultation with civil society organizations that work in the field of gender equality and other stakeholders.
3. Assign a gender focal point within the CEC Secretariat, who will ensure that the strategy and the action plan are fully implemented, and that the gender perspective is considered in the development and implementation of CEC policies.
4. Ensure that the legal framework, including the Law on Gender Equality, is implemented within the CEC at both the local and national level.
5. Include a statement encouraging women to apply in all vacancy announcements for election staff that are recruited directly by the CEC, and consider gender balance when recruiting for both permanent and temporary positions.
6. Encourage political entities to consider gender balance when nominating staff for electoral management, and work with the political entities that have signed the Declaration on Inclusion of Women in Electoral Management to assist them, when necessary, in upholding their commitment.
7. Conduct gender sensitization training for temporary election staff, Municipal Election Commissions and Polling Station Commissions as part of their election training.
8. Ensure that, as far as is feasible, polling station staff are assigned a polling station in proximity to their homes, particularly for women, who may have less access to transportation or who cannot travel longer distance late in the nights.
9. Encourage women to participate in elections as election staff through pre-election public information campaigns targeted to women. Use images of women election staff in promotional materials to increase public awareness and acceptance of women in these positions.

10. Liaise with civil society to develop a standard gender checklist, to be used by observers to monitor elections from a gender perspective. The data collected should be analyzed by the CEC Gender Focal Point to provide the CEC with a report on the inclusion of women in elections.
11. Develop a reporting mechanism where election staff, observers, and voters can report any form of harassment, pressure, or other violation, and proactively tackle the issues as they are reported.
12. Use the Election Staff Management System to monitor gender balance in election staff, and issue reports with disaggregated data based on gender after each election.
13. Promote working in elections as a significant contribution from both men and women for the democracy of the country and as a way of contributing to transparent and legitimate elections.
14. Ensure that elections are orderly, transparent, and democratic, so that the general public perceives them as fair and safe to participate and work in.

Recommendations for political entities:

15. Conduct an internal gender analysis to identify the barriers to and opportunities for inclusion of women within the political entity's structure, and use this analysis as the basis of actions to achieve gender equality within this structure.
16. Develop a Gender Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan in consultation with civil society organizations that work in the field of gender equality and other stakeholders.
17. Utilize the gender focal points or women's forums to facilitate and oversee the full implementation of the strategy and action plan, and ensure there is gender mainstreaming within the political entity at all levels.
18. Ensure that women are engaged in all formal and informal meetings, where there are discussions of and decisions about policy issues and activities.
19. Provide leadership programs and professional trainings for women members during non-election periods, through which women can enhance their skill sets in areas such as electoral operations, public speaking and debate, and policy analysis.
20. Conduct gender sensitization training for men and women members to enhance their understanding of the significance of gender equality.
21. Target recruiting women for election staff, candidate and party executive positions from groups that have high potential to get engaged, particularly young women and women who work in occupations that are mostly filled by women.
22. Ensure that the political entity's statute is inclusive in terms of gender, persons with disabilities, minorities, and other marginalized groups.
23. Consider a gender quota for executive and other positions within or nominated by the political entity, as a temporary tool to promote gender equality.
24. Promote gender equality in interactions with citizens, and serve as a model for changes in societal attitudes towards women.
25. Ensure fair treatment for supporters of other political entities, in order to change the perception that association with political entities may have consequences.
26. Emphasize to the entity's election staff, observers, and activists, that violence, harassment, and other electoral violations are not an acceptable form of representing the entity.

Recommendation for civil society organizations:

27. Monitor the level of compliance by political entities that have signed the Declaration on the Inclusion of Women in Electoral Management, and advocate for full compliance.
28. Develop a standard gender checklist, preferably in conjunction with the CEC, which can be used by all observers to monitor elections from a gender perspective, and report the data to the CEC and other electoral stakeholders.
29. Inform women about opportunities to serve in election staff in any activity, where this discussion can be included, and encourage them to participate in any election staff position.
30. Promote working in elections as a significant contribution from both men and women for the democracy of the country and as a way of contributing to transparent and legitimate elections.
31. Work with men and women to address some societal attitudes towards women, to increase acceptance and support for the employment of women in electoral management.
32. Work closely with electoral stakeholders to ensure orderly and safe elections that will address the safety concerns of some citizens, particularly women.

International Best Practices

Different countries have taken different measures to increase the number of women in election staff. Some have introduced legal quotas, as temporary tools, while others have developed policies that provide incentives for women to get more engaged.

Gender quotas for EMBs

Albania and **Macedonia** have provisions about gender representation in EMBs in their electoral codes. The codes require that at least 30 percent of positions in EMBs at the national and local level be filled by one gender.

In **Nepal**, there are provisions for representation of one gender in specific positions. The Nepal Election Code of Conduct and Directives requires electoral stakeholders to target 50 percent of one gender in polling centers, as well as voter education and voter registration teams. Furthermore, the positions for marking the fingers of voters and managing the women's queue in each polling center are reserved for women.

In **Kenya**, the electoral law requires that no more than two-thirds of election employees are of the same gender.

In **India**, it is required that there is at least one women per polling station. In addition to mixed polling station, there are also women only polling station to increase the comfort of women voters.

Policies to encourage women engagement in EMBs

In **Georgia**, there is a policy that allows flexible working hours for women who have specific circumstances, such as pregnancy or childcare (applicable for mothers of children under the age of 11). The Georgian election commission has a database of the elections staff that is subject to this policy, and through it ensures that it offers the necessary support for women election officials. Flexible working hours were also arranged in **Romania**.

The election commission in **Afghanistan** has developed mentoring programs, where women have opportunities to be mentored and gain the necessary skills and knowledge to be promoted in different positions within the commission.

In **Nepal**, there is a Gender Unit and a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Focal Point within the election commission that oversees the work of the election commission in terms of gender equality.

Conclusion

There are numerous barriers that lead to under-representation of women in election staff. The barriers related to political will and societal attitudes towards women are perceived as more difficult to tackle. However, as this research shows, the first step towards tackling these barriers is an increase in awareness. The proportion of women in electoral management has not been a topic for discussion in Kosovo due to a skewed perception that the election staff is comprised of a minimum 40 percent women, when in reality the percentages in the recent elections are half of that. With an increase in awareness about the actual number of women in electoral management and the barriers to engaging more women, stakeholders will be able to address some of these issues. It is also significant for all stakeholders to understand the benefits of added perspectives, ideas and knowledge that come with more women being involved in electoral management, as that can be a powerful incentive to increase efforts of ensuring there is gender balance in EMBs. The inclusion of women in electoral management has an impact in increasing voter turnout among women, creating a pool of qualified women who can then also be engaged in decision-making levels, and increasing the quality of the election process, which ultimately leads to more legitimate and widely accepted elections.

Annex I: Barriers to Women's Participation as Election Staff Identified During Focus Group Discussions, Meetings with Political Entities and CSOs, and Workshops

SOCIETAL ATTITUDES TO WOMEN	
1	Balkan Mentality
2	Hours are too long for women to be able to work (5 a.m. to 7 p.m. or 1 a.m. depending on the position)
3	Family obligations make it difficult for women to be available for training (two days for members and three days for Chairs)
4	Few women have access to transportation (particularly in more rural areas)
5	Lack of ability to lift ballot boxes
6	Lack of ability to deal with pressure
7	Lack of qualifications (including the perception that women are more illiterate)
8	Lack of courage
9	Lack of interest to work in these positions
10	Women are more emotional
11	Too fearful
12	Can be easily manipulated
13	Women cannot be manipulated
14	Too fragile to be put at risk
15	Not persistent enough
16	Have to take care of the children and/or family
17	May not be allowed by family members
18	Jealousy from their spouses
19	Morality: Because they have to work in an environment with a lot of men, until very late, it doesn't look good and people may talk
20	The perception that politics and elections are a field for men
21	Inability to break through the patriarchal mentality of political parties
22	Sexual harassment
23	Women tend to flake more: they say they will come to events or serve as staff, but end up not coming
24	Religion
CONCERNS ABOUT CONSEQUENCES OF BEING AN ELECTION STAFF	
25	The perception that elections are violent and that one can be beaten
26	The perception that there are psychological pressures from political parties to act in a certain way
27	Threats
28	The fear of collective punishment
29	Tensions

30	Fear of association with specific parties; if that party doesn't win, the party that does won't hire them in any position because of political affiliation
31	Fear of association with specific parties; aside from yourself, your family can be subject to discrimination because of your political affiliation
POLITICAL WILL	
32	Lack of implementation for the law on gender equality (40 percent of staff in public institutions should be women)
33	No sanctions for political entities that do not nominate women for election staff
34	Nominations come from the sub-branches, and cannot be controlled
35	Nominations come from the central level, and cannot be controlled
36	Other parties will bring "muscles" and so should we
37	Due to the patriarchal mentality, women can be excluded: mostly men are invited to coffee shops to discuss political issues

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